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The Burning of Saint Paul's.

London. Published by Hugh Cunningham. 1841.

OLD SAINT PAUL'S:

A TALE OF

THE PLAGUE AND THE FIRE.

BY

WILLIAM HARRISON AINSWORTH.

AUTHOR OF "THE TOWER OF LONDON," ETC.

"A dreadful Plague in London was
In the year Sixty Five,
Which swept an hundred thousand souls
Away, — *yet I alive.*"
DEFOE. *History of the Great Plague of London.*

"Nor could thy fabric, Paul's, defend thee long,
Though thou wert sacred to thy Maker's praise,
Though made immortal by a poet's song,
And poets' songs the Theban walls could raise.

"The daring flames pept in, and saw from far
The awful beauties of thy sacred quire:
But since it was profaned by Civil War,
Heaven thought it fit to have it purged by fire."
DRYDEN. *Annus Mirabilis.*

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN FRANKLIN.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:
HUGH CUNNINGHAM, SAINT MARTIN'S PLACE,
TRAFALGAR SQUARE.

1841.

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CONTENTS

OF THE

THIRD VOLUME.

Book the Fourth.

SEPTEMBER, 1665.

Chapter		Page
I.	THE PLAGUE AT ITS HEIGHT	3
II.	THE SECOND PLAGUE-PIT	28
III.	THE HOUSE IN NICHOLAS LANE	56
IV.	THE TRIALS OF AMABEL	95
V.	THE MARRIAGE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES	109
VI.	THE CERTIFICATE	126

Book the Fifth.

DECEMBER, 1665.

I.	THE DECLINE OF THE PLAGUE	149
II.	THE MIDNIGHT MEETING	173

Book the Sixth.

SEPTEMBER, 1666.

I.	THE FIRE-BALL	191
II.	THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE FIRE	206
III.	PROGRESS OF THE FIRE	221
IV.	LEONARD'S INTERVIEW WITH THE KING	236
V.	HOW LEONARD SAVED THE KING'S LIFE	252
VI.	HOW THE GROCER'S HOUSE WAS BURNT	268
VII.	THE BURNING OF SAINT PAUL'S	284
VIII.	HOW LEONARD RESCUED THE LADY ISABELLA	300
IX.	WHAT BEFEL CHOWLES AND JUDITH IN THE VAULTS OF SAINT FAITH'S	311
X.	CONCLUSION	319

ILLUSTRATIONS.

VOL. III.

The Burning of Saint Paul's .	to face the Title.
	Page
Leonard Holt conveying the packet to the Grocer .	15
Judith Malmayns meditating the murder of Amabel	125
The body of Amabel carried to the dead-cart .	145
The fate of Chowles and Judith . . .	311

OLD SAINT PAUL'S.

Book the Fourth.

SEPTEMBER 1665.

CHAPTER I.

THE PLAGUE AT ITS HEIGHT.

Amabel's departure for Berkshire caused no change in her father's mode of life. Everything proceeded as before within his quiet dwelling; and, except that the family were diminished in number, all appeared the same. It is true they wanted the interest, and indeed the occupation afforded them by the gentle invalid, but in other respects, no difference was observable. Devotional exercises, meals, the various duties of the house, and cheerful discourse, filled up the day, which never proved wearisome. The result proved the correctness of Mr. Bloundel's judgment. While the scourge continued weekly to extend its ravages throughout the city, it never crossed his threshold; and, except suffering in a slight degree from scorbutic affections, occasioned by the salt meats to which they were now confined, and for which the lemon and lime-juice, provided against such a contingency, proved an efficacious remedy,

all the family enjoyed perfect health. For some weeks after her separation from her daughter, Mrs. Bloundel continued in a desponding state, but after that time she became more reconciled to the deprivation, and partially recovered her spirits. Mr. Bloundel did not dare to indulge a hope that Amabel would ever return, but though he suffered much in secret, he never allowed his grief to manifest itself. The circumstance that he had not received any intelligence of her did not weigh much with him, because the difficulty of communication became greater and greater, as each week the scourge increased in violence, and he was inclined to take no news as good news. It was not so in the present case, but of this he was happily ignorant.

In this way, a month passed on. And now every other consideration was merged in the alarm occasioned by the daily-increasing fury of the pestilence. Throughout July the excessive heat of the weather underwent no abatement, but in place of the clear atmosphere that had prevailed during the preceding month, unwholesome blights filled the air, and, confining the pestilential effluvia, spread the contagion far and wide with extraordinary rapidity. Not only was the city suffocated with heat, but filled with noisome smells, arising from the carcases with which the close alleys and other out-of-the-way places were crowded, and which were so far decomposed as not to be capable of removal.

The aspect of the river was as much changed as that of the city. Numbers of bodies were thrown into it, and floating up with the tides, were left to taint the air on its banks, while strange ill-omened fowl, attracted thither by their instinct, preyed upon them. Below the bridge, all captains of ships moored in the Pool or off Wapping, held as little communication as possible with those on shore, and only received fresh provisions with the greatest precaution. As the plague increased, most of these removed lower down the river, and many of them put out entirely to sea. Above the bridge, most of the wherries and other smaller craft had disappeared, their owners having taken them up the river, and moored them against its banks at different spots, where they lived in them under tilts. Many hundreds of persons remained upon the river in this way during the whole continuance of the visitation.

August had now arrived, but the distemper knew no cessation. On the contrary, it manifestly increased in violence and malignity. The deaths rose a thousand in each week, and in the last week in this fatal month, amounted to upwards of sixty thousand!

But terrible as this was, the pestilence had not yet reached its height. Hopes were entertained that when the weather became cooler, its fury would abate; but these anticipations were fearfully disappointed. The bills of mortality rose the first

week in September to seven thousand, and though they slightly decreased during the second week,—awakening a momentary hope,—on the third they advanced to twelve thousand! In less than ten days, upwards of two thousand persons perished in the parish of Aldgate alone; while Whitechapel suffered equally severely. Out of the hundred parishes in and about the City, one only, that of Saint John the Evangelist in Watling Street, remained uninfected, and this merely because there was scarcely a soul left within it, the greater part of the inhabitants having quitted their houses, and fled into the country.

The deepest despair now seized upon all the survivors. Scarcely a family but had lost half of its number,—many more than half,—while those who were left felt assured that their turn would speedily arrive. Even the reckless were appalled, and abandoned their evil courses. Not only were the dead lying in the passages and alleys, but even in the main thoroughfares, and none would remove them. The awful prediction of Solomon Eagle that "grass would grow in the streets, and that the living should not be able to bury the dead," had come to pass. London had become one vast lazar-house, and seemed in a fair way of becoming a mighty sepulchre.

During all this time, Saint Paul's continued to be used as a pest-house, but it was not so crowded as heretofore, because as not one in fifty of the in-

fected recovered when placed under medical care, it was not thought worth while to remove them from their own abodes. The number of attendants, too, had diminished. Some had died, but the greater part had abandoned their offices from a fear of sharing the fate of their patients. In consequence of these changes, Judith Malmayns had been advanced to the post of chief-nurse at the cathedral. Both she and Chowles had been attacked by the plague, and both had recovered. Judith attended the coffin-maker, and it was mainly owing to her that he got through the attack. She never left him for a moment, and would never suffer any one to approach him—a necessary precaution, as he was so much alarmed by his situation that he would infallibly have made some awkward revelations. When Judith, in her turn, was seized, Chowles exhibited no such consideration for her, and scarcely affected to conceal his disappointment at her recovery. This want of feeling on his part greatly incensed her against him, and though he contrived in some degree to appease her, it was long before she entirely forgave him. Far from being amended by her sufferings, she seemed to have grown more obdurate, and instantly commenced a fresh career of crime. It was not, however, necessary now to hasten the end of the sick. The distemper had acquired such force and malignity that it did its work quickly enough—often too quickly;—and all she

sought was to obtain possession of the poor patients' attire, or any valuables they might possess worth appropriating. To turn to the brighter side of the picture, it must not be omitted, that when the pestilence was at its height, and no offers could induce the timorous to venture forth, or render assistance to the sufferers, Sir John Lawrence the Lord Mayor, the Duke of Albemarle, the Earl of Craven, and the Archbishop of Canterbury devoted themselves to the care of the infected, and supplied them with every necessary they required. Among the physicians no one deserves more honourable mention than Doctor Hodges, who was unremitting in his attentions to the sufferers.

To return to the grocer. While the plague was thus raging around him, and while every house in Wood Street, except one or two, from which the inmates had fled, was attacked by the pestilence, he and his family had remained untouched. About the middle of August, he experienced a great alarm. His second son, Hubert, fell sick, and he removed him to one of the upper rooms, which he had set aside as a hospital, and attended upon him himself. In a few days, however, his fears were removed, and he found, to his great satisfaction, that the youth had not been attacked by the plague, but was only suffering from a slight fever, which quickly yielded to the remedies applied. About the same time, too, he lost his porter, Dallison. The poor fellow did not make his appear-

ance as usual for two days, and intelligence of his fate was brought on the following day by his wife, who came to state that her husband was dead, and had been thrown into the plague-pit at Aldgate. The same night, however, she brought another man, named Allestry, who took the place of the late porter, and acquainted his employer with the deplorable state of the city.

Two days afterwards, Allestry himself died, and Mr. Bloundel had no one to replace him. He thus lost all means of ascertaining what was going forward; but the deathlike stillness around him, broken only by the hoarse tolling of a bell, by a wild shriek or other appalling cry, proclaimed too surely the terrible state of things. Sometimes, too, a passenger would go by, and would tell him the dreadful height to which the bills of mortality had risen, assuring him that ere another month had expired, not a soul would be left alive in London.

One night, as Solomon Eagle, who had likewise been miraculously preserved, pursued his course through the streets, he paused before Mr. Bloundel's house, and looking up at the window at which the latter chanced to be stationed, cried in a loud voice, "Be of good cheer. You have served God faithfully, and there shall no evil befall you, neither shall the plague come nigh your dwelling." And raising his arms, as if invoking a blessing upon the habitation, he departed.

It was now the second week in September, and

as yet Mr. Bloundel had received no tidings of his daughter. At any other season he would have been seriously uneasy, but now, as has been already stated, all private grief was swallowed up in the horror of the general calamity. Satisfied that she was in a healthful situation, and that her chance of preservation from the pestilence was better than that of any other member of his family, he turned his thoughts entirely to them. Redoubling his precautions, he tried by every means to keep up the failing spirits of his household, and but rarely ventured to open his shutter, and look forth on the external world.

On the tenth of September, which was afterwards accounted the most fatal day of this fatal month, a young man of a very dejected appearance, and wearing the traces of severe suffering in his countenance, entered the west end of London, and took his way slowly towards the city. He had passed Saint Giles' without seeing a single living creature, or the sign of one in any of the houses. The broad thoroughfare was completely grown over with grass, and the habitations had the most melancholy and deserted air imaginable. Some doors and windows were wide open, discovering rooms with goods and furniture scattered about, having been left in this state by their inmates; but most part of them were closely fastened up.

As he proceeded along Holborn, the ravages of the scourge were yet more apparent. Every house, on either side of the way, had a red cross,

with the fatal inscription above it, upon the door. Here and there, a watchman might be seen, looking more like a phantom than a living thing. Formerly, the dead were conveyed away at night, but now the carts went about in the day time. On reaching Saint Andrew's, Holborn, several persons were seen wheeling hand-barrows filled with corpses, scarcely covered with clothing, and revealing the blue and white stripes of the pestilence, towards a cart, which was standing near the church gates. The driver of the vehicle, a tall cadaverous-looking man, was ringing his bell, and jesting with another person, whom the young man recognized, with a shudder, as Chowles. The coffin-maker also recognized him at the same moment, and called to him, but the other paid no attention to the summons, and passed on.

Crossing Holborn Bridge, he toiled faintly up the opposite hill, for he was evidently suffering from extreme debility, and on gaining the summit was obliged to support himself against a wall, for a few minutes, before he could proceed. The same frightful evidences of the ravages of the pestilence were observable here as elsewhere. The houses were all marked with the fatal cross, and shut up. Another dead cart was heard rumbling along, accompanied by the harsh cries of the driver, and the doleful ringing of the bell. The next moment the loathly vehicle was seen coming along the Old Bailey. It paused before a house, from which four bodies were brought, and then

passed on towards Smithfield. Watching its progress with fearful curiosity, the young man noted how often it paused to increase its load. His thoughts, coloured by the scene, were of the saddest and dreariest complexion. All around wore the aspect of death. The few figures in sight seemed staggering towards the grave, and the houses appeared to be plague-stricken like the inhabitants. The heat was intolerably oppressive, and the air tainted with noisome exhalations. Ever and anon, a window would be opened, and a ghastly face thrust from it, while a piercing shriek, or lamentable cry, was uttered. No business seemed going on — there were no passengers — no vehicles in the streets. The mighty city was completely laid prostrate.

After a short rest, the young man shaped his course towards Saint Paul's, and on reaching its western precincts, gazed for some time at the reverend structure, as if its contemplation called up many and painful recollections. Tears started to his eyes, and he was about to turn away, when he perceived the figure of Solomon Eagle stationed near the cross at the western extremity of the roof. The enthusiast caught sight of him at the same moment, and motioned him to come nearer.

"What has happened?" he demanded, as the other approached the steps of the portico.

The young man shook his head mournfully.

"It is a sad tale," he said, "and cannot be told now."

"I can conjecture what it is," replied Solomon Eagle. "But come to the small door near the northern entrance of the cathedral at midnight. I will meet you there."

"I will not fail," replied the young man.

"One of the terrible judgments which I predicted would befall this devoted city is come to pass," cried Solomon Eagle. "Another yet remains — the judgment by fire, and if its surviving inhabitants repent not, of which there is as yet no sign, it will assuredly follow."

"Heaven avert it!" groaned the other, turning away.

Proceeding along Cheapside, he entered Wood Street, and took his way towards the grocer's dwelling. When at a little distance from it, he paused, and some minutes elapsed before he could muster strength to go forward. Here, as elsewhere, there were abundant indications of the havoc occasioned by the fell disease. Not far from the grocer's shop, and in the middle of the street, lay the body of a man, with the face turned upwards, while crouching in an angle of the wall sat a young woman watching it. As the young man drew nearer, he recognised in the dead man the principal of the Brotherhood of Saint Michael, and in the poor mourner, one of his profligate female associates.

"What has become of your unhappy companions?" he demanded of the woman.

"The last of them lies there," she rejoined mournfully. "All the rest died long ago. My lover was true to his vow, and instead of deploring their fate, lived with me and three other women in mirth and revelry till yesterday, when the three women died, and he fell sick. He did not, however, give in, but continued carousing until an hour before his death."

Too much shocked to make any reply, the young man proceeded towards the hutch. Beneath a doorway, at a little distance from it, sat a watchman with a halbert on his shoulder, guarding the house; but it was evident he would be of little further use. His face was covered with his hands, and his groans proclaimed that he himself was attacked by the pestilence. Entering the hutch, the young man pulled the cord of the bell, and the summons was soon after answered by the grocer, who appeared at the window.

"What, Leonard Holt!" he exclaimed, in surprise, on seeing the young man, — "is it you? — what ails you? — you look frightfully ill."

"I have been attacked a second time by the plague," replied the apprentice, "and am only just recovered from it."

"What of my child?" cried the grocer, eagerly, — "what of her?"

"Alas, alas!" exclaimed the apprentice.

Leonard Holt conveying the Packet to the Grocer.

London Published by Hugh Cunningham 1841.

"Do not keep me in suspense," rejoined the grocer. "Is she dead?"

"No, not dead," replied the apprentice, "but—"

"But what?" ejaculated the grocer — "in Heaven's name speak!"

"These letters will tell you all," replied the apprentice, producing a packet. "I had prepared them to send to you in case of my death. I am not equal to further explanation now."

With trembling eagerness, the grocer lowered the rope, and Leonard having tied the packet to it, it was instantly drawn up.

Notwithstanding his anxiety to ascertain the fate of Amabel, Mr. Bloundel would not touch the packet until he had guarded against the possibility of being infected by it. Seizing it with a pair of tongs, he plunged it into a pan containing a strong solution of vinegar and sulphur, which he had always in readiness in the chamber, and when thoroughly saturated, laid it in the sun to dry. On first opening the shutter to answer Leonard's summons, he had flashed off a pistol, and he now sought to expel the external air by setting fire to a ball composed of quick brimstone, saltpetre, and yellow amber, which being placed on an iron plate speedily filled the room with a thick vapour, and prevented the entrance of any obnoxious particles. These precautions taken, he again addressed himself, while the packet was drying, to Leonard, whom he found gazing anxiously at the window,

and informed him that all his family had hitherto escaped contagion.

"A special providence must have watched over you, sir," replied the apprentice; "and I believe yours is the only family in the whole city that has been so spared. I have reason to be grateful for my own extraordinary preservation, and yet I would rather it had pleased Heaven to take me away than leave me to my present misery."

"You keep me in a frightful state of suspense, Leonard," rejoined the grocer, regarding the packet wistfully, "for I dare not open your letters till they are thoroughly fumigated. You assure me my child is living. Has she been attacked by the plague?"

"Would she had!" groaned Leonard.

"Is she still at Ashdown?" pursued the grocer. "Ah! you shake your head.—I see!—I must be beside myself not to have thought of it before. She is in the power of the Earl of Rochester."

"She is," replied Leonard, catching at the angle of the shed for support.

"And I am here!" exclaimed Mr. Bloundel, forgetting his caution, and thrusting himself far out of the window, as if with the intention of letting himself down by the rope,—"I am here, when I ought to be near her!"

"Calm yourself, I beseech you, sir," cried Leonard. "A moment's rashness will undo all you have done."

"True!" replied the grocer, checking himself. "I must think of the others as well as of her. But where is she? Hide nothing from me."

"I have reason to believe she is in London," replied the apprentice. "I traced her hither, and should not have desisted from my search, if I had not been checked by the plague, which attacked me on the night of my arrival. I was taken to the pest-house near Westbourne Green, where I have been for the last three weeks."

"If she was brought to London, as you state," rejoined the grocer, "I cannot doubt but she has fallen a victim to the scourge."

"It may be," replied Leonard, moodily, "and I would almost hope it is so. When you peruse my letters you will learn that she was carried off by the Earl from the residence of a lady at Kingston Lisle, whither she had been removed for safety, and after being taken from place to place, was at last conveyed to an old hall in the neighbourhood of Oxford, where she was kept concealed for nearly a month."

"Answer me, Leonard," cried the grocer, "and do not attempt to deceive me. Has she preserved her honour?"

"Up to the time of quitting Oxford, she had preserved it," replied the apprentice. "She herself assured me she had resisted all the Earl's importunities, and would die rather than yield to him. But I will tell you how I obtained an inter-

view with her. After a long search, I discovered the place of her concealment, the old hall I have just mentioned, and climbed in the night, and at the hazard of my life, to the window of the chamber where she was confined. I saw and spoke with her; and having arranged a plan by which I hoped to accomplish her deliverance on the following night, descended. Whether our brief conference was overheard, and communicated to the Earl, I know not; but it would seem so, for he secretly departed with her the next morning, taking the road, as I subsequently learnt, to London. I instantly started in pursuit, and had reached Paddington, when I fell ill, as I have related."

"What you tell me in some measure eases my mind," replied Mr. Bloundel, after a pause; "for I feel that my daughter, if alive, will be able to resist her persecutor. But what has become of your companions?"

"Nizza Macascree has met with the same fate as Amabel," replied Leonard. "She was unfortunate enough to attract the King's attention when he visited Ashdown Lodge, in company of the Earl of Rochester, and was conveyed to Oxford, where the court is now held, and must speedily have fallen a victim to her royal lover if she had not disappeared, having been carried off, it was supposed, by Sir Paul Parravicin. But the villain was frustrated in his infamous design. The King's suspicion falling upon him, he was instantly ar-

rested, and though he denied all knowledge of Nizza's retreat, and was afterwards liberated, his movements were so strictly watched that he had no opportunity of visiting her."

"You do not mention Blaize," said Mr. Bloundel. "No ill, I trust, has befallen him?"

"I grieve to say he has been attacked by the distemper he so much dreaded," replied Leonard. "He accompanied me to London, but quitted me when I fell sick, and took refuge with a farmer named Wingfield, residing near Kensal Green. I accidentally met Wingfield this morning, and he informed me that Blaize was taken ill the day before yesterday, and removed to the pest-house in Finsbury-fields. I will go thither presently, and see what has become of him. Is Doctor Hodges still among the living?"

"I trust so," replied Mr. Bloundel, "though I have not seen him for the last ten days."

He then disappeared for a few minutes, and on his return lowered a small basket containing a flask of canary, a loaf which he himself had baked, and a piece of cold boiled beef. The apprentice thankfully received the provisions, and retiring to the hutch, began to discuss them, fortifying himself with a copious draught of canary. Having concluded his repast, he issued forth, and acquainting Mr. Bloundel, who had at length ventured to commence reading the contents of the packet by the aid of powerful glasses, that he

was about to proceed to Doctor Hodges's residence, to inquire after him, set off in that direction.

Arrived in Great Knight-rider Street, he was greatly shocked at finding the door of the Doctor's habitation fastened, nor could he make any one hear, though he knocked loudly and repeatedly against it. The shutters of the lower windows were closed, and the place looked completely deserted. All the adjoining houses were shut up, and not a living being could be discerned in the street from whom information could be obtained relative to the physician. Here, as elsewhere, the pavement was overgrown with grass, and the very houses had a strange and melancholy look, as if sharing in the general desolation. On looking down a narrow street leading to the river, Leonard perceived a flock of poultry scratching among the staves in search of food, and instinctively calling them, they flew towards him, as if delighted at the unwonted sound of a human voice. These, and a half-starved cat, were the only living things that he could perceive. At the further end of the street, he caught sight of the river, speeding in its course towards the bridge, and scarcely knowing whither he was going, sauntered to its edge. The tide had just turned, and the stream was sparkling in the sunshine, but no craft could be discovered upon its bosom, and except a few barges moored to its sides, all vestiges

of the numberless vessels with which it was once crowded were gone. Its quays were completely deserted. Boxes and bales of goods lay untouched on the wharfs; the cheering cries with which the workmen formerly animated their labour were hushed. There was no sound of creaking cords; —no rattle of heavy chains; — none of the busy hum ordinarily attending the discharge of freight from a vessel, or the packing of goods and stores on board. All traffic was at an end; and this scene, usually one of the liveliest possible, was now forlorn and desolate. On the opposite shore of the river it appeared to be the same, — indeed, the borough of Southwark was now suffering the utmost rigour of the scourge; — and except for the rows of houses on its banks, and the noble bridge by which it was spanned, the Thames appeared as undisturbed as it must have been before the great city was built upon its banks.

The apprentice viewed this scene with a singular kind of interest. He had become so accustomed to melancholy sights that his feelings had lost their acuteness, and the contemplation of the deserted buildings and neglected wharfs around him, harmonized with his own gloomy thoughts. Pursuing his walk along the side of the river, he was checked by a horrible smell, and looking downward, he perceived a carcase in the last stage of decomposition lying in the mud. It had been washed ashore by the tide, and a large

bird of prey was contending for possession of it with a legion of water-rats. Sickened by the sight, he turned up a narrow thoroughfare near Baynard's Castle, and crossing Thames Street, was about to ascend Addle Hill, when he perceived a man wheeling a hand-barrow, containing a couple of corpses, in the direction of the river, with the intention, doubtless, of throwing them into it, as the readiest means of disposing of them. Both bodies were stripped of their clothing, and the blue tint of the nails, as well as the blotches with which they were covered, left no doubt as to the disease of which they had died. Averting his gaze from the spectacle, Leonard turned off on the right along Carter Lane, and threading a short passage, approached the southern boundary of the cathedral, and proceeding towards the great door opposite him, passed through it. The mighty lazar-house was less crowded than he expected to find it, but its terrible condition far exceeded his worst conceptions. Not more than half the pallets were occupied; but as the sick were in a great measure left to themselves, the utmost disorder prevailed. A troop of lazars, with sheets folded around them, glided, like phantoms, along Paul's Walk, and mimicked in a ghastly manner the air and deportment of the gallants who had formerly thronged the place. No attempt being made to maintain silence, the noise was perfectly stunning; some of the sick were shrieking,— some

laughing in a wild unearthly manner,—some praying, — some uttering loud execrations, — others groaning and lamenting. The holy building seemed to have become the abode of evil and tormented spirits. Many dead were lying in the beds,— the few attendants who were present not caring to remove them; and Leonard had little doubt that before another sun went down the whole of the ghastly assemblage before him would share their fate. If the habitations he had recently gazed upon had appeared plague-stricken, the sacred structure in which he was now standing seemed yet more horribly contaminated. Ill kept, and ill ventilated, the air was loaded with noxious effluvia, while the various abominations that met the eye at every turn would have been sufficient to produce the distemper in any one who had come in contact with them. They were, however, utterly disregarded by the miserable sufferers and their attendants. The magnificent painted windows were dimmed by a thick clammy steam, which could scarcely be washed off;—while the carved oak screens, the sculptured tombs, the pillars, the walls, and the flagged floors were covered with impurities.

Satisfied with a brief survey of this frightful scene, Leonard turned to depart, and was passing the entrance to Saint Faith's, which stood open, when he caught sight of Judith standing at the foot of the broad stone steps, and holding a lamp

in her hand. She was conversing with a tall, richly-dressed man, whose features he fancied he had seen before, though he could not at the moment call them to mind. After a brief conversation, they moved off into the depths of the vault, and he lost sight of them. All at once, it occurred to Leonard that Judith's companion was the unfortunate stranger whose child he had interred, and who had been so strangely affected at the sight of Nizza Macascree. Determined to ascertain the point, he hurried down the steps, and plunged into the vault. It was buried in profound darkness, and he had not proceeded far when he stumbled over something lying in his path, and found from the groan that followed that it was a plague-patient. Before he could regain his feet, the unfortunate sufferer whom he had thus disturbed, implored him in piteous accents, which, with a shudder, he recognised as those of Blaize, to remove him. Leonard immediately gave the poor porter to understand that he was near him, and would render him every aid in his power.

"Your assistance comes too late, Leonard," groaned Blaize,—"it 's all over with me now, but I don't like to breathe my last in this dismal vault, without medicine or food, both of which I am denied by that infernal hag, Mother Malmayns, who calls herself a nurse, but who is in reality a robber and murderess. Oh! the frightful scenes I

have witnessed since I have been brought here! I told you I should not escape the plague. I shall die of it—I am sure I shall."

"I thought you were at the pest-house in Finsbury Fields," said Leonard.

"I was taken there," replied Blaize; "but the place was full, and they would not admit me, so I was sent to Saint Paul's, where there was plenty of room. Yesterday I did pretty well, for I was in the great ward above, and one of the attendants obeyed my directions implicitly, and I am certain if they had been fully carried out, I should have got well. I will tell you what I did. As soon as I was placed on a pallet, and covered with blankets, I ordered a drink to be prepared of the inner bark of an ash tree, green walnuts, scabious vervain, and saffron, boiled in two quarts of the strongest vinegar. Of this mixture I drank plentifully, and it soon produced a plentiful perspiration. I next had a hen,—a live one of course,—stripped of the feathers, and brought to me. Its bill was held to the large blotch under my arm, and kept there till the fowl died from the noxious matter it drew forth. I next repeated the experiment with a pigeon, and derived the greatest benefit from it. The tumour had nearly subsided, and if I had been properly treated afterwards I should now be in a fair way of recovery. But instead of nice strengthening chicken broth flavoured with succory and marigolds; or water-gruel mixed with

rosemary, and winter-savoury; or a panado seasoned with verjuice or wood sorrel; instead of swallowing large draughts of warm beer; or water boiled with carduus seeds; or a posset-drink made with sorrel, bugloss, and borage; — instead of these remedies, or any other, I was carried to this horrible place when I was asleep, and strapped to my pallet, as you perceive. Unloose me, if you can do nothing else."

"That I will readily do," replied Leonard; "but I must first procure a light."

With this, he groped his way among the close ranks of ponderous pillars, but though he proceeded with the utmost caution he could not avoid coming in contact with the beds of some of the other patients, and disturbing them. At length, he descried a glimmer of light issuing from a door which he knew to be that of the vestry, and which was standing slightly ajar. Opening it, he perceived a lamp burning on the table, and without stopping to look around him, seized it, and hurried back to the porter. Poor Blaize presented a lamentable, and yet grotesque appearance. His plump person was greatly reduced in bulk, and his round cheeks had become hollow and cadaverous. He was strapped, as he had stated, to the pallet, which in its turn was fastened to the adjoining pillar. A blanket was tightly swathed around him, and a large cloth was bound round his head in lieu of a night-cap.

Leonard instantly set about releasing him, and had just unfastened the straps when he heard footsteps approaching, and looking up, perceived the stranger and Judith Malmayns advancing towards him.

CHAPTER II.

THE SECOND PLAGUE-PIT.

Judith, being a little in advance of her companion, took Leonard in the first instance for a chirurgeon's assistant, and called to him in a harsh and menacing voice to let her charge alone. On drawing near, however, she perceived her mistake, and, recognizing the apprentice, halted with a disconcerted look. By this time, the stranger had come up, and remarking her embarrassment inquired the cause of it.

"Look there," cried Judith, pointing towards the apprentice. "Yonder stands the very man you seek."

"What! Leonard Holt," cried the other, in astonishment.

"Ay, Leonard Holt," rejoined Judith. "You can now put any questions to him you think proper."

The stranger did not require the suggestion to to be repeated, but instantly hastened to the apprentice.

"Do you remember me?" he asked.

Leonard answered in the affirmative.

"I owe you a large debt of obligation," continued the stranger, "and you shall not find me slow in paying it. But let it pass for the moment. Do you know aught of Nizza Macascree? I know she was taken to Oxford by the King, and subsequently disappeared."

"Then you know as much as I do of her, sir," rejoined Leonard.

"I was right, you see, Mr. Thirlby," interposed Judith with a malicious grin. "I told you this youth would be utterly ignorant of her retreat."

"My firm conviction is that she is in the power of Sir Paul Parravicin," observed Leonard. "But it is impossible to say where she is concealed."

"Then my last hope of finding her has fallen to the ground," replied Thirlby with a look of great distress. "Ever since my recovery from the plague, I have been in search of her. I traced her from Ashdown Park to Oxford, but she was gone before my arrival at the latter place; and though I made every possible inquiry after her, and kept strict and secret watch upon the villain whom I suspected, as you do, of carrying her off, I could gain no clue to her retreat. Having ascertained, however, that you were seen in the neighbourhood of Oxford about the time of her disappearance, I had persuaded myself you must

have aided her escape. But now," he added with a groan, "I find I was mistaken."

"You were so," replied Leonard, mournfully. "I was in search of my master's daughter, Amabel, who was carried off at the same time by the Earl of Rochester, and my anxiety about her made me neglectful of Nizza."

"I am not ignorant of your devoted attachment to her," remarked the stranger.

"You will never find Amabel again," observed Judith, bitterly.

"What mean you, woman?" asked Leonard.

"I mean what I say," rejoined Judith. "I repeat, you will never see her again."

"You would not speak thus positively without some motive," returned Leonard, seizing her arm. "Where is she? What has happened to her?"

"That you shall never learn from me," returned Judith, with a triumphant glance.

"Speak, or I will force you to do so," cried Leonard, furiously.

"Force me!" cried Judith, laughing derisively; "you know not whom you threaten."

"But *I* do," interposed Thirlby. "This young man *shall* have an answer to his question," he continued, addressing her in an authoritative tone. "Do you know anything of the girl?"

"No," replied Judith; "I was merely jesting with him."

"Shame on you, to trifle with his feelings thus,"

rejoined Thirlby. "Step with me this way, young man. I wish to speak with you."

"Do not leave me here, Leonard," cried Blaize, "or I shall die before you come back."

"I have no intention of leaving you," rejoined Leonard. "Are you aware whether Doctor Hodges is still alive, sir?" he added, to Thirlby. "I have just been to his residence in Great Knight-rider Street, and found it shut up."

"He has removed to Watling Street," replied the other; "but I have not seen him since my return to London. If you wish it, I will go to his house at once, and send him to look after your poor friend."

Leonard was about to return thanks for the offer, when the design was frustrated by Blaize himself, who was so terrified by Judith's looks, that he could pay no attention to what was going forward; and fearing, notwithstanding Leonard's assurance to the contrary, that he should be left behind, he started to his feet, and wrapping the blanket about him, ran up the steps leading to the cathedral. Leonard and Thirlby followed, and seeing him dart into the southern aisle, would have pursued him along it, but were afraid of coming in contact with the many sick persons by whom it was thronged. They contented themselves, therefore, with watching his course, and were not a little surprised and alarmed to find the whole troop of lazars set off after him, making the sacred

walls ring with their cries. Frightened by the clamour, Blaize redoubled his speed, and with this ghastly train at his heels, crossed the lower part of the mid aisle, and darting through the pillars, took refuge within Bishop Kempe's Chapel, the door of which stood open, and which he instantly closed after him. Judith, who had followed the party from the subterranean church, laughed heartily at the chace of the poor porter, and uttered an exclamation of regret at its sudden conclusion. Leonard, however, being apprehensive of mischief from the crowd of sick persons collected before the door, some of whom were knocking against it and trying to force it open, addressed himself to a couple of the attendants, and prevailed on them to accompany him to the chapel. The assemblage was speedily dispersed, and Blaize hearing Leonard's voice, instantly opened the door and admitted him; and, as soon as his fears were allayed, he was placed on a pallet within the chapel, and wrapped up in blankets, while such remedies as were deemed proper were administered to him. Committing him to the care of the attendants, and promising to reward them well for their trouble, Leonard told Blaize he should now go and bring Doctor Hodges to him. Accordingly, he departed, and finding Thirlby waiting for him at the south door, they went forth together.

"I am almost afraid of leaving the poor fellow," said Leonard, hesitating as he was about to descend

the steps. "Judith Malmayns is so cunning and unscrupulous that she may find some means of doing him an injury."

"Have no fear," replied Thirlby. "She has promised me not to molest him further."

"You appear to have a strange influence over her, then," observed Leonard. "May I ask how you have obtained it."

"No matter," replied the other. "It must suffice that I am willing to exercise it in your behalf."

"And you are not disposed to tell me the nature of the interest you feel in Nizza Macascree?" pursued Leonard.

"Not as yet," replied Thirlby, with a look and tone calculated to put a stop to further inquiries.

Passing through Saint Austin's Gate, they approached Watling Street, at the corner of which stood the house where Doctor Hodges had taken up his temporary abode, that he might visit the sick in the cathedral with greater convenience, and be more readily summoned whenever his attendance might be required. Thirlby's knock at the door was answered to Leonard's great satisfaction by the old porter, who was equally delighted to see him. It did not escape Leonard that the porter treated the stranger with great respect, and he inferred from this that he was a person of some consideration, as indeed his deportment bespoke him. The old man informed them that his master had been summoned on a case of urgency early

in the morning, and had not yet returned, neither was he aware whither he was gone. He promised, however, to acquaint him with Blaize's condition immediately on his return — "and I need not assure you," he added to Leonard, "that he will instantly go to him."

Thirlby then inquired of the porter whether Mike Macascree, the blind piper, was still at Dame Lucas's cottage, in Finsbury Fields, and was answered in the affirmative by the old man, who added, however, in a voice of much emotion, that the good dame herself was no more.

"She died about a fortnight ago of the plague," he said, "and is buried where she desired to be, beneath an old apple tree in her garden."

"Alas!" exclaimed Leonard, brushing away a tear, "her own foreboding is too truly realized."

"I am about to visit the old piper," observed Thirlby to the apprentice. "Will you go with me?"

The other readily acquiesced, only stipulating that they should call in Wood Street on the way, that he might inquire whether his master wanted him. Thirlby agreeing to this, and the old porter repeating his assurance that Leonard might make himself quite easy as to Blaize, for he would send his master to him the instant he returned, they set out. On reaching Wood Street, the apprentice gave the customary signal, and the grocer answering it, he informed him of his unexpected meeting

with Blaize, and of the state in which he had left him. Mr. Bloundel was much distressed by the intelligence, and telling Leonard that he should not require him again that night, besought him to observe the utmost caution. This the apprentice promised, and joining Thirlby, who had walked forward to a little distance, they struck into a narrow street on the right, and proceeding along Aldermanbury, soon arrived at the first postern in the city walls beyond Cripplegate.

Hitherto, Thirlby had maintained a profound silence, and appeared lost in melancholy reflection. Except now and then casting a commiserating glance at the wretched objects they encountered on the road, he kept his eyes steadily fixed upon the ground, and walked at a brisk pace, as if desirous of getting out of the city as quickly as possible. Notwithstanding his weakness, Leonard managed to keep up with him, and his curiosity being greatly aroused by what had just occurred, he began to study his appearance and features attentively. Thirlby was full six feet in height, and possessed a powerful and well proportioned figure, and would have been considered extremely handsome but for a certain sinister expression about the eyes, which were large and dark, but lighted by a fierce and peculiar fire. His complexion was dark, and his countenance still bore the impress of the dreadful disease from which he had recently recovered. A gloomy shade sat

about his brow, and it seemed to Leonard as if he had been led by his passions into the commission of crimes of which he had afterwards bitterly repented. His deportment was proud and commanding, and though he exhibited no haughtiness towards the apprentice, but on the contrary treated him with great familiarity, it was plain he did so merely from a sense of gratitude. His age was under forty, and his habiliments were rich, though of a sombre colour.

Passing through the postern, which stood wide open, the watchmen having disappeared, they entered a narrow lane, skirted by a few detached houses, all of which were shut up, and marked with the fatal cross. As they passed one of these habitations, they were arrested by loud and continued shrieks of the most heart-rending nature, and questioning a watchman who stood at an adjoining door, as to the cause of them, he said they proceeded from a poor lady who had just lost the last of her family by the plague.

"Her husband and all her children, except one daughter, died last week," said the man, "and though she seemed deeply afflicted, yet she bore her loss with resignation. Yesterday, her daughter was taken ill, and she died about two hours ago, since when the poor mother has done nothing but shriek in the way you hear. Poor soul! she will die of grief, as many have done before her at this awful time."

"Something must be done to pacify her," returned Thirlby, in a voice of much emotion, — "she must be removed from her child."

"Where can she be removed to?" rejoined the watchman. "Who will receive her?"

"At all events, we can remove the object that occasions her affliction," rejoined Thirlby. "My heart bleeds for her. I never heard shrieks so dreadful."

"The dead-cart will pass by in an hour," said the watchman; "and then the body can be taken away."

"An hour will be too late," rejoined Thirlby. "If she continues in this frantic state, she will be dead before that time. You have a hand-barrow there. Take the body to the plague-pit at once, and I will reward you for your trouble."

"We shall find some difficulty in getting into the house," said the watchman, who evidently felt some repugnance to the task.

"Not so," replied Thirlby. And pushing forcibly against the door, he burst it open, and directed by the cries entered a room on the right. The watchman's statement proved correct. Stretched upon a bed in one corner lay the body of a beautiful girl, while the poor mother was bending over it in a state bordering on distraction. On seeing Thirlby, she fled to the further end of the room, but did not desist from her cries. In fact, she was unable to do so, being under

the dominion of the wildest hysterical passion. In vain Thirlby endeavoured to make her comprehend by signs the nature of his errand. Waving him off, she continued shrieking more loudly than ever. Half-stunned by the cries, and greatly agitated by the sight of the child, whose appearance reminded him of his own daughter, Thirlby motioned the watchman who had followed him into the room to bring away the body, and rushed forth. His injunctions were obeyed. The remains of the unfortunate girl were wrapped in a sheet, and deposited in the hand-barrow. The miserable mother followed the watchman to the door, but did not attempt to interfere with him, and having seen the body of her child disposed of in the manner above-described, turned back. The next moment, a heavy sound proclaimed that she had fallen to the ground, and her shrieks were hushed. Thirlby and Leonard exchanged sad and significant looks, but neither of them went back to see what had happened to her. The watchman shook his head, and setting the barrow in motion, proceeded along a narrow foot-path across the fields. Remarking that he did not take the direct road to the plague-pit, Leonard called to him, and pointed out the quarter in which it lay.

"I know where the old plague-pit is, as well as you," replied the watchman, "but it has been

filled these three weeks. The new pit lies in this direction."

So saying, he pursued his course, and they presently entered a field, in the middle of which lay the plague-pit, as was evident from the immense mound of clay thrown out of the excavation.

"That pit is neither so deep nor so wide as the old one," said the watchman, "and if the plague goes on at this rate they will soon have to dig another, — that is, if any one should be left alive to undertake the job."

And chuckling as if he had said a good thing, he impelled his barrow forward more quickly. A few seconds brought them near the horrible chasm. It was more than half full, and in all respects resembled the other pit, except that it was somewhat smaller. There was the same heaving and putrifying mass, — the same ghastly objects of every kind, — the grey-headed old man, the dark-haired maiden, the tender infant, — all huddled together.

Wheeling the barrow to the edge of the pit, the watchman cast his load into it; and without even tarrying to throw a handful of soil over it, turned back, and rejoined Thirlby, who had halted at some distance from the excavation.

While the latter was searching for his purse to reward the watchman, they heard wild shrieks in the adjoining field, and the next moment perceived the wretched mother running towards them.

Guessing her purpose from his former experience, Leonard called to the others to stop her, and stretching out his arms placed himself in her path. But all their efforts were in vain. She darted past them, and though Leonard caught hold of her she broke from him, and, leaving a fragment of her dress in his grasp, flung herself into the chasm.

Well knowing that all help was vain, Thirlby placed a few pieces of money in the watchman's hand, and hurried away. He was followed by Leonard, who was equally eager to quit the spot. It so chanced that the path they had taken led them near the site of the old plague-pit, and Leonard pointed it out to his companion. The latter stopped for a moment, and then, without saying a word, ran quickly towards it. On reaching the spot, they found that the pit was completely filled up. The vast cake of clay with which it was covered had swollen and cracked in an extraordinary manner, and emitted such a horrible effluvium that they both instantly retreated.

"And that is the grave of my poor child," cried Thirlby, halting and bursting into a passionate flood of tears. "It would have been a fitting resting-place for a guilty wretch like me; but for her it is horrible."

Allowing time for the violence of his grief to subside, Leonard addressed a few words of consolation to him, and then tried to turn the current of his thoughts by introducing a different subject.

With this view, he proceeded to detail the piper's mysterious conduct as to the packet, and concluded by mentioning the piece of gold which Nizza wore as an amulet, and which she fancied must have some connection with her early history.

"I have heard of the packet and amulet from Doctor Hodges," said Thirlby; "and should have visited the piper on my recovery from the plague, but I was all impatience to behold Nizza, and could not brook an instant's delay. But you know his cottage. We cannot be far from it."

"Yonder it is," replied Leonard, pointing to the little habitation which lay at a field's distance from them — "and we are certain to meet with him, for I hear the notes of his pipe."

Nor was he deceived, for as they crossed the field, and approached the cottage, the sounds of a melancholy air played on the pipe became each instant more distinct. Before entering the gate, they paused for a moment to listen to the music, and Leonard could not help contrasting the present neglected appearance of the garden with the neatness it exhibited when he last saw it. It was overgrown with weeds, while the drooping flowers seemed to bemoan the loss of their mistress. Leonard's gaze involuntarily wandered in search of the old apple tree, and he presently discovered it. It was loaded with fruit, and the rounded sod beneath it proclaimed the grave of the ill-fated Dame Lucas.

Satisfied with this survey, Leonard opened the gate, but had no sooner set foot in the garden than the loud barking of a dog was heard, and Bell rushed forth. Leonard instantly called to her, and on hearing his voice, the little animal instantly changed her angry tones to a gladsome whine, and skipping towards him fawned at his feet.

While he stooped to caress her, the piper, who had been alarmed by the barking, appeared at the door, and called out to know who was there? At the sight of him, Thirlby, who was close behind Leonard, uttered a cry of surprise, and exclaiming, "It is he!" rushed towards him.

The cry of recognition uttered by the stranger caused the piper to start as if he had received a sudden and violent shock. The ruddy tint instantly deserted his cheek, and was succeeded by a deadly paleness; his limbs trembled, and he bent forward with a countenance of the utmost anxiety, as if awaiting a confirmation of his fears. When within a couple of yards of him, Thirlby paused, and having narrowly scrutinized his features, as if to satisfy himself he was not mistaken, again exclaimed, though in a lower and deeper tone than before, "It is he!" and seizing his arm, pushed him into the house, banging the door to after him in such a manner as to leave no doubt in the apprentice's mind that his presence was not desired. Accordingly, though extremely anxious to hear what passed between them, certain their con-

versation must relate to Nizza Macascree, Leonard did not attempt to follow, but accompanied by Bell, who continued to gambol round him, directed his steps towards the grave of Dame Lucas. Here he endeavoured to beguile the time in meditation, but in spite of his efforts to turn his thoughts into a different channel, they perpetually recurred to what he supposed to be taking place inside the house. The extraordinary effect produced by Nizza Macascree on Thirlby—the resemblance he had discovered between her and some person dear to him—the anxiety he appeared to feel for her, as evidenced by his recent search for her — the mysterious connection which clearly subsisted between him and the piper—all these circumstances convinced Leonard that Thirlby was, or imagined himself, connected by ties of the closest relationship with the supposed piper's daughter.

Leonard had never been able to discern the slightest resemblance either in manner or feature, or in those indescribably slight personal peculiarities that constitute a family likeness, between Nizza and her reputed father,—neither could he now recal any particular resemblance between her and Thirlby; still, he could not help thinking her beauty and high-bred looks savoured more of the latter than the former. He came, therefore, to the conclusion that she must be the offspring of some early and unfortunate attachment on the part of Thirlby, whose remorse might naturally be the

consequence of his culpable conduct at that time. His sole perplexity was the piper's connexion with the affair; but he got over this difficulty by supposing that Nizza's mother, whoever she was, must have committed her to Macascree's care when an infant, probably with strict injunctions, which circumstances might render necessary, to conceal her even from her father. Such was Leonard's solution of the mystery; and feeling convinced that he had made himself master of the stranger's secret, he resolved to give him to understand as much as soon as he beheld him again.

More than half an hour having elapsed, and Thirlby not coming forth, Leonard began to think sufficient time had been allowed him for private conference with the piper, and he therefore walked towards the door, and coughing to announce his approach, raised the latch and entered the house. He found the pair seated close together, and conversing in a low and earnest tone. The piper had completely recovered from his alarm, and seemed perfectly at ease with his companion, while all traces of anger had disappeared from the countenance of the other. Before them on the table lay several letters, taken from a packet, the cover of which Leonard recognized as the one that had been formerly entrusted to him. Amidst them was the miniature of a lady,—at least, it appeared so to Leonard, in the hasty glance he caught of it; but he could not be quite sure, for, on seeing him,

Thirlby closed the case, and placing his hand on the piper's mouth, to check his farther speech, arose.

"Forgive my rudeness," he said, to the apprentice, "but I have been so deeply interested in what I have just heard, that I quite forgot you were waiting without. I shall remain here some hours longer, but will not detain you, especially as I am unable to admit you to our conference. I will meet you at Doctor Hodges' in the evening, and shall have much to say to you."

"I can anticipate some part of your communication," replied Leonard. "You will tell me you have a daughter still living."

"You are inquisitive, young man," rejoined Thirlby, sternly.

"You do me wrong, sir," replied Leonard. "I have no curiosity as regards yourself; and if I had, would never lower myself in my own estimation to gratify it. Feeling a strong interest in Nizza Macascree, I am naturally anxious to know whether my suspicion that a near relationship subsists between yourself and her is correct."

"I cannot enter into farther explanation now," returned Thirlby. "Meet me at Doctor Hodges' this evening, and you shall know more. And now, farewell. I am in the midst of a deeply-interesting conversation, which your presence interrupts. Do not think me rude,—do not think me ungrateful. My anxiety must plead my excuse."

"None is necessary, sir," replied Leonard; "I will no longer place any restraint upon you."

So saying, and taking care not to let Bell out, he passed through the door, and closed it after him. Having walked to some distance across the fields, musing on what had just occurred, and scarcely conscious whither he was going, he threw himself down on the grass, and fell asleep. He awoke after some time much refreshed, and finding he was considerably nearer Bishopsgate than any other entrance into the city, determined to make for it. A few minutes brought him to a row of houses without the walls, none of which appeared to have escaped infection, and, passing them, he entered the city gate. As he proceeded along the once-crowded, but now utterly-deserted thoroughfare that opened upon him, he could scarcely believe he was in a spot which had once been the busiest of the busy haunts of men,—so silent, so desolate did it appear! On reaching Cornhill, he found it equally deserted. The Exchange was closed, and, as Leonard looked at its barred gates, a saddening train of reflection passed through his mind. His head declined upon his breast, and he continued lost in a mournful reverie until he was roused by a hand laid on his shoulder, and starting,—for such a salutation at this season was alarming,—he looked round, and beheld Solomon Eagle.

"You are looking upon that structure," said the

enthusiast, "and are thinking how much it is changed. Men who possess boundless riches imagine their power above that of their Maker, and suppose they may neglect and defy him. But they are mistaken. Where are now the wealthy merchants who used to haunt those courts and chambers?—why do they not come here as of old?—why do they not buy and sell, and send their messengers and ships to the farthest parts of the world? Because the Lord hath smitten them and driven them forth—'From the least of them even to the greatest of them,' as the prophet Jeremiah saith, 'every one has been given to covetousness.' The balances of deceit have been in their hands. They have cozened their neighbours, and greedily gained from them, and will find it true what the prophet Ezekiel hath written, that 'the Lord will pour out his indignation upon them, and consume them with the fire of his wrath.' Yea, I tell you, unless they turn from their evil ways,—unless they cast aside the golden idol they now worship, and set up the Holy One of Israel in its stead, a fire will be sent to consume them, and that pile which they have erected as a temple to their God shall be burnt to the ground."

Leonard's heart was too full to make any answer, and the enthusiast, after a brief pause, again addressed him.

"Have you seen Doctor Hodges pass this way? I am in search of him."

"On what account?" asked Leonard, anxiously. "His advice, I trust, is not needed on behalf of any one in whom I am interested."

"No matter," replied Solomon Eagle, in a sombre tone. "Have you seen him?"

"I have not," rejoined the apprentice; "but he is probably at Saint Paul's."

"I have just left the cathedral, and was told he had proceeded to some house near Cornhill," rejoined the enthusiast.

"If you have been there, you can perhaps tell me how my master's porter, Blaize Shotterel, is getting on," said Leonard.

"I can," replied the enthusiast. "I heard one of the chirurgeons say that Doctor Hodges had pronounced him in a fair way of recovery. But I must either find the doctor, or go elsewhere. Farewell!"

"I will go with you in search of him," said Leonard.

"No, no,—you must not—shall not," cried Solomon Eagle.

"Wherefore not?" asked the apprentice.

"Do not question me,—but leave me," rejoined the enthusiast.

"Do you know aught of Amabel—of her retreat?" persisted Leonard, who had a strange misgiving that the enthusiast's errand in some way referred to her.

"I do," replied Solomon Eagle, gloomily; "but I again advise you not to press me further."

"Answer me one question at least," cried Leonard. "Is she with the Earl of Rochester?"

"She is," replied Solomon Eagle; "but I shall allay your fears in that respect when I tell you she is sick of the plague."

Leonard heard nothing more, for, uttering a wild shriek, he fell to the ground insensible. He was aroused to consciousness by a sudden sense of strangulation, and opening his eyes, beheld two dark figures bending over him, one of whom was kneeling on his chest. A glance showed him that this person was Chowles; and instantly comprehending what was the matter, and aware that the coffin-maker was stripping him previously to throwing him into the dead-cart, which was standing hard-by, he cried aloud, and struggled desperately to set himself free. Little opposition was offered; for, on hearing the cry, Chowles quitted his hold, and retreating to a short distance, exclaimed, with a look of surprise, "Why, the fellow is not dead, after all!"

"I am neither dead, nor likely to die, as you shall find to your cost, rascal, if you do not restore me the clothes you have robbed me of," cried Leonard, furiously.

And chancing to perceive a fork, dropped by Chowles in his hasty retreat, he snatched it up, and brandishing it over his head, advanced towards him. Thus threatened, Chowles tossed him a rich suit of livery.

"These are not mine," said the apprentice, gazing at the habiliments.

"They are better than your own," replied Chowles, "and therefore you ought to be glad of the exchange. But give me them back again. I have no intention of making you a present."

"This is the livery of the Earl of Rochester," cried Leonard.

"To be sure it is," replied Chowles, with a ghastly smile. "One of his servants is just dead."

"Where is the profligate noble?" cried Leonard eagerly.

"There is the person who owned these clothes," replied Chowles, pointing to the dead-cart. "You had better ask him."

"Where is the Earl of Rochester, I say, villain?" cried Leonard, menacingly.

"How should I know?" rejoined Chowles. "Here are your clothes," he added, pushing them towards him.

"I will have an answer," cried Leonard.

"Not from me," replied Chowles.

And hastily snatching up the livery, he put the cart in motion, and proceeded on his road.

Leonard would have followed him, but the state of his attire did not permit him to do so. Having dressed himself, he hastened to the cathedral, where he soon found the attendant who had charge of Blaize.

"Doctor Hodges has been with him," said the

man, in reply to his inquiries after the porter, "and has good hopes of him. But the patient is not entirely satisfied with the treatment he has received, and wishes to try some remedies of his own. Were his request granted, all would soon be over with him."

"That I am sure of," replied Leonard. "But let us go to him."

"You must not heed his complaints," returned the attendant. "I assure you he is doing as well as possible; but he is so dreadfully frightened at a trifling operation which Doctor Hodges finds it necessary to perform upon him, that we have been obliged to fasten him to the bed."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Leonard, suspiciously. "Has Judith Malmayns had no hand in this arrangement?"

"Judith Malmayns has been absent during the whole of the afternoon," said the man, "and another nurse has taken her place in Saint Faith's. She has never been near Blaize since I have had charge of him."

By this time, they had reached the pallet in which the porter was laid. His eyes and a small portion of his snub-nose were alone visible, his head being still enveloped by the linen cloth, while his mouth was covered by blankets. He looked so anxiously at the apprentice that the latter removed the covering from his mouth, and enabled him to speak.

"I am glad to find you are getting on so well," said Leonard, in a cheerful tone. "Doctor Hodges has been with you, I understand?"

"He has," groaned Blaize; "but he has done me no good,—none whatever. I could doctor myself much better, if I might be allowed; for I know every remedy that has been prescribed for the plague, but he would adopt none that I mentioned to him. I wanted him to place a hot loaf, fresh from the oven, to the tumour, to draw it; but he would not consent. Then I asked for a cataplasm, composed of radish-roots, mustard-seed, onions and garlic roasted, mithridate, salt, and soot from a chimney where wood only has been burnt. This he liked no better than the first. Next, I begged for an ale posset with pimpernel soaked in it, assuring him that by frequently drinking such a mixture, Secretary Naunton drew the infection from his very heart. But the doctor would have none of it, and seemed to doubt the fact."

"What did he do?" inquired Leonard.

"He applied oil of Saint John's wort to the tumour," replied Blaize, with a dismal groan, "and said if the scar did not fall off, he must cauterize it. Oh! I shall never be able to bear the pain of the operation."

"Recollect your life is at stake," rejoined Leonard. "You must either submit to it, or die."

"I know I must," replied Blaize, with a prolonged groan; "but it is a terrible alternative."

"You will not find the operation so painful as you imagine," rejoined Leonard; "and you know I speak from personal experience."

"You give me great comfort," said Blaize. "And so you really think I shall get better?"

"I have no doubt of it, if you keep up your spirits," replied Leonard. The worst is evidently over. Behave like a man."

"I will try to do so," rejoined Blaize. "I have been told that if a circle is drawn with a blue sapphire round a plague-botch, it will fall off. Couldn't we just try the experiment?"

"It will not do to rely upon it," observed the attendant, with a smile. "You will find a small knob of red-hot iron, which we call 'the button,' much more efficacious."

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" exclaimed Blaize, "I already feel that dreadful button burning into my flesh."

"On the contrary, you won't feel it at all," replied the attendant. "The iron only touches the point of the tumour, in which there is no sensibility."

"In that case, I don't care how soon the operation is performed," replied Blaize.

"Doctor Hodges will choose his own time for it," said the attendant. "In the mean time, here is a cup of barley broth for you. You will find it do you good."

While the man applied the cup to the poor

porter's lips,—for he would not unloose the straps for fear of mischief,—Leonard, who was sickened by the terrible scene around him, took his departure, and quitted the cathedral by the great western entrance. Seating himself on one of the great blocks of stone left there by the workmen employed in repairing the cathedral, but who had long since abandoned their task, he thought over all that had recently occurred. Raising his eyes at length, he looked toward the cathedral. The oblique rays of the sun had quitted the columns of the portico, which looked cold and grey, while the roof and towers were glittering in light. In ten minutes more only the summit of the central tower caught the last reflection of the declining orb. Leonard watched the rosy gleam till it disappeared, and then steadfastly regarded the reverend pile as its hue changed from grey to black, until, at length, each pinnacle and buttress, each battlement and tower, was lost in one vast indistinct mass. Night had fallen upon the city,—a night destined to be more fatal than any that had preceded it. And yet it was so calm, so beautiful, so clear, that it was scarcely possible to imagine that it was unhealthy. The destroying angel was, however, fearfully at work. Hundreds were falling beneath his touch; and as Leonard wondered how many miserable wretches were at that moment released from suffering, it crossed him like an icy chill that among the number might be Amabel.

So forcibly was he impressed by this idea, that he fell on his knees and prayed aloud.

He was aroused by hearing the ringing of a bell, which announced the approach of the dead-cart, and presently afterwards the gloomy vehicle approached from Ludgate-hill, and moved slowly towards the portico of the cathedral, where it halted. A great number of dead were placed within it, and the driver, ringing his bell, proceeded in the direction of Cheapside. A heavy dew had fallen, for, as Leonard put his hand to his clothes, they felt damp, and his long hair was filled with moisture. Reproaching himself with having needlessly exposed himself to risk, he was about to walk away, when he heard footsteps at a little distance, and looking in the direction of the sound, perceived the tall figure of Thirlby. Calling to him, the other, who appeared to be in haste, halted for a moment, and telling the apprentice he was going to Doctor Hodges's, desired him to accompany him thither, and went on.

CHAPTER III.

THE HOUSE IN NICHOLAS LANE.

On reaching Watling Street, Leonard and his companion found Doctor Hodges was from home. This did not much surprise the apprentice after the information he had received from Solomon Eagle, but Thirlby was greatly disappointed, and eagerly questioned the porter as to the probable time of his master's return. The man replied that it was quite uncertain, adding, "He has been in since you were last here, and has seen Blaize. He had not been gone to the cathedral many minutes when a gentleman arrived desiring his instant attendance upon a young woman who was sick of the plague."

"Did you hear her name?" asked Leonard and Thirlby, in a breath.

"No," replied the porter, "neither did I obtain any information respecting her from the gentleman, who appeared in great distress. But I observed that my master on his return looked

much surprised at seeing him, and treated him with a sort of cold respect."

"Was the gentleman young or old?" demanded Leonard hastily.

"As far as I noticed," replied the porter, "for he kept his face covered with a handkerchief, I should say he was young — very young."

"You are sure it was not Lord Rochester?" pursued Leonard.

"How should I be sure of it," rejoined the porter, "since I have never seen his lordship that I am aware of. But I will tell you all that happened, and you can then judge for yourselves. My master, as I have just said, on seeing the stranger, looked surprised and angry, and bowing gravely, conducted him to his study, taking care to close the door after him. I did not of course hear what passed, but the interview was brief enough, and the gentleman issuing forth, said as he quitted the room, 'You will not fail to come?' To which my master replied, 'Certainly not, on the terms I have mentioned.' With this, the gentleman hurried out of the house. Shortly afterwards, the Doctor came out, and said to me, 'I am going to attend a young woman who is sick of the plague, and may be absent for some time. If Mr. Thirlby or Leonard Holt should call, detain them till my return.'"

"My heart tells me that the young woman

he is gone to visit is no other than Amabel," said Leonard Holt, sorrowfully.

"I suspect it is Nizza Macascree," cried Thirlby. "Which way did your master take?"

"I did not observe," replied the porter, "but he told me he should cross London Bridge."

"I will go into Southwark in quest of him," said Thirlby. "Every moment is of consequence now."

"You had better stay where you are," remarked the old porter. "It is the surest way to meet with him."

Thirlby, however, was too full of anxiety to listen to reason, and his impatience producing a corresponding effect upon Leonard, though from a different motive, they set forth together.

"If I fail to find him, you may expect me back ere long," were Thirlby's last words to the porter. Hurrying along Watling Street, and taking the first turn on the right, he descended to Thames Street, and made the best of his way towards the bridge. Leonard followed him closely, and they pursued their rapid course in silence. By the time they reached the north gate of the bridge, Leonard found his strength failing him, and halting at one of the openings between the tall houses over-looking the river, where there was a wooden bench for the accommodation of passengers, he sank upon it, and begged Thirlby to go on, saying he would return to Watling Street

as soon as he recovered from his exhaustion. Thirlby did not attempt to dissuade him from his purpose, but instantly disappeared.

The night, it has before been remarked, was singularly beautiful. It was almost as light as day, for the full harvest moon (alas! there was no harvest for it to smile upon!) having just risen, revealed every object with perfect distinctness. The bench on which Leonard was seated lay on the right side of the bridge, and commanded a magnificent reach of the river, that flowed beneath like a sheet of molten silver. The apprentice gazed along its banks, and noted the tall spectral-looking houses on the right, until his eye finally settled on the massive fabric of Saint Paul's, the roof and towers of which towered above the lesser structures. His meditations were suddenly interrupted by the opening of a window in the house near him, while a loud splash in the water told that a body had been thrown into it. He turned away with a shudder, and at the same moment perceived a watchman with a halbert upon his shoulder, advancing slowly towards him from the Southwark side of the bridge. Pausing as he drew near the apprentice, the watchman compassionately inquired whether he was sick, and being answered in the negative, was about to pass on, when Leonard, fancying he recognised his voice, stopped him.

"We have met somewhere before, friend," he

said, "though where, or under what circumstances, I cannot at this moment call to mind."

"Not unlikely," returned the other roughly; "but the chances are against our meeting again."

Leonard heaved a sigh at the remark.

"I now recollect where I met you, friend," he remarked. "It was at Saint Paul's, when I was in search of my master's daughter, who had been carried off by the Earl of Rochester. But you were then in the garb of a smith."

"I recollect the circumstance, too, now you remind me of it," replied the other. "Your name is Leonard Holt as surely as mine is Robert Rainbird. I recollect also that you offended me about a dog belonging to the piper's pretty daughter, Nizza Macascree, which I was about to destroy in obedience to the Lord Mayor's commands. However, I bear no malice, and if I did, this is not a time to rip up old quarrels."

"You are right, friend," returned Leonard. "The few of us left ought to be in charity with each other."

"Truly, ought we," rejoined Rainbird. "For my own part, I have seen so much misery within the last few weeks, that my disposition is wholly changed. I was obliged to abandon my old occupation of a smith, because my master died of the plague, and there was no one else to employ me. I have therefore served as a watchman, and in twenty days have stood at the doors of more

than twenty houses. It would freeze your blood were I to relate the scenes I have witnessed."

"It might have done formerly," replied Leonard; "but my feelings are as much changed as your own. I have had the plague twice myself."

"Then, indeed, you *can* speak," replied Rainbird. "Thank God, I have hitherto escaped it! Ah! these are terrible times — terrible times? The worst that ever London knew. Although I have been hitherto miraculously preserved myself, I am firmly persuaded no one will escape."

"I am almost inclined to agree with you," replied Leonard.

"For the last week the distemper has raged fearfully — fearfully, indeed," said Rainbird; "but yesterday and to-day have far exceeded all that have gone before. The distempered have died quicker than cattle of the murrain. I visited upwards of a hundred houses in the Borough this morning, and only found ten persons alive; and out of those ten not one I will venture to say is alive now. It will, in truth, be a mercy if they are gone. There were distracted mothers raving over their children, — a young husband lamenting his wife, — two little children weeping over their dead parents, with none to attend them, none to feed them, — an old man mourning over his son, cut off in his prime. In short, misery and distress in their worst form, — the streets ringing with

shrieks and groans, and the numbers of dead so great that it was impossible to carry them off. You remember Solomon Eagle's prophecy!"

"Perfectly," replied Leonard; "and I lament to see its fulfilment."

"'The streets shall be covered with grass, and the living shall not be able to bury the dead,'—so it ran," said Rainbird. "And it has come to pass. Not a carriage of any description, save the dead cart, is to be seen in the broadest streets of London, which are now as green as the fields without her walls, and as silent as the grave itself. Terrible times, as I said before,—terrible times! The dead are rotting in heaps in the courts, in the alleys, in the very houses, and no one to remove them. What will be the end of it all? What will become of this great city?"

"It is not difficult to foresee what will become of it," replied Leonard, "unless it pleases the Lord to stay his vengeful arm. And something whispers in my ear that we are now at the worst. The scourge cannot exceed its present violence without working our ruin; and deeply as we have sinned, little as we repent, I cannot bring myself to believe that God will sweep his people entirely from the face of the earth."

"I dare not hope otherwise," rejoined Rainbird, "though I would fain do so. I discern no symptoms of abatement of the distemper, but, on the contrary, an evident increase of malignity, and

such is the opinion of all I have spoken with on the subject. Chowles told me he buried two hundred more yesterday than he had ever done before, and yet he did not carry a third of the dead to the plague pit. He is a strange fellow that Chowles. But for his passion for his horrible calling there is no necessity for him to follow it, for he is now one of the richest men in London."

"He must have amassed his wealth by robbery then," remarked Leonard.

"True," returned Rainbird. "He helps himself without scruple to the clothes, goods, and other property of all who die of the pestilence, and after ransacking their houses, conveys his plunder in the dead cart to his own dwelling."

"In Saint Paul's?" asked Leonard.

"No, a large house in Nicholas Lane, once belonging to a wealthy merchant, who perished with his family of the plague," replied Rainbird. "He has filled it from cellar to garret with the spoil he has obtained."

"And how has he preserved it?" inquired the apprentice.

"The plague has preserved it for him," replied Rainbird. "The few authorities who now act have, perhaps, no knowledge of his proceedings; or if they have, have not cared to interfere, awaiting a more favourable season, if it should ever arrive, to dispossess him of his hoard, and punish him for his delinquencies; while in the mean time

they are glad, on any terms, to avail themselves of his services as a burier. Other people do not care to meddle with him, and the most daring robber would be afraid to touch infected money or clothes."

"If you are going towards Nicholas Lane," said Leonard, as if struck with a sudden idea, "and will point out to me the house in question, you will do me a favour."

Rainbird nodded assent, and they walked on together towards Fish Street Hill. Ascending it, and turning off on the right, they entered Great Eastcheap, but had not proceeded far when they were obliged to turn back, the street being literally choked up with a pile of carcasses deposited there by the buriers' assistants. Shaping their course along Gracechurch Street, they turned off into Lombard Street, and as Leonard gazed at the goldsmiths' houses on either side, which were all shut up, with the fatal red cross on the doors, he could not help remarking to his companion, "the plague has not spared any of these on account of their riches."

"True," replied the other, "and of the thousands who used formerly to throng this street not one is left. Woe to London! — woe! — woe!"

Leonard echoed the sentiment, and fell into a melancholy train of reflection. It has been more than once remarked that the particular day now

under consideration was the one in which the plague exercised its fiercest dominion over the city; and though at first its decline was as imperceptible as the gradual diminution of the day after the longest has passed, yet still the alteration began. On that day, as if Death had known that his power was to be speedily arrested, he sharpened his fellest arrows, and discharged them with unerring aim. To pursue the course of the Destroyer from house to house — to show with what unrelenting fury he assailed his victims — to describe their sufferings — to number the dead left within their beds, thrown into the streets, or conveyed to the plague-pits — would be to present a narrative as painful as revolting. On this terrible night it was as hot as if it had been the middle of June. No air was stirring, and the silence was so profound, that a slight noise was audible at a great distance. Hushed in this seemingly placid repose lay the great city, while hundreds of its inhabitants were groaning in agony, or breathing their last sigh.

On reaching the upper end of Nicholas Lane, Rainbird stood still for a moment, and pointed out a large house on the right, just below the old church dedicated to the saint from which the thoroughfare took its name. They were about to proceed towards it, when the smith again paused, and called Leonard's attention to two figures quickly advancing from the lower end of the street.

As the apprentice and his companion stood in the shade, they could not be seen, while the two persons, being in the moonlight, were fully revealed. One of them it was easy to perceive was Chowles. He stopped before the door of his dwelling and unfastened it, and while he was thus occupied, the other person turned his face so as to catch the full radiance of the moon, disclosing the features of Sir Paul Parravicin. Before Leonard recovered from the surprise into which he was thrown by this unexpected discovery, they had entered the house.

He then hurried forward, but, to his great disappointment, found the door locked. Anxious to get into the house without alarming those who had preceded him, he glanced at the windows; but the shutters were closed and strongly barred. While hesitating what to do, Rainbird came up, and guessing his wishes, told him there was a door at the back of the house by which he might probably gain admittance. Accordingly they hastened down a passage skirting the churchyard, which brought them to a narrow alley lying between Nicholas Lane and Abchurch Lane. Tracking it for about twenty yards, Rainbird paused before a small yard door, and trying the latch, found it yielded to his touch.

Crossing the yard, they came to another door. It was locked, and though they could have easily burst it open, they preferred having recourse to an

adjoining window, the shutter of which being carelessly fastened, was removed without noise or difficulty. In another moment they gained a small dark room on the ground floor, whence they issued into a passage, where, to their great joy, they found a lighted lantern placed on a chair. Leonard hastily possessed himself of it, and was about to enter a room on the left when his companion arrested him.

"Before we proceed further," he said, in a low voice, "I must know what you are about to do?"

"My purpose will be explained in a word," replied the apprentice, in the same tone. "I suspect that Nizza Macascree is confined here by Sir Paul Parravicin and Chowles, and if it turns out I am right in my conjecture, I propose to liberate her. Will you help me?"

"Humph!" exclaimed Rainbird, "I don't much fancy the job. However, since I am here, I'll not go back. I am curious to see the coffin-maker's hoards. Look at yon heap of clothes. There are velvet doublets and silken hose enow to furnish wardrobes for a dozen court gallants. And yet, rich as the stuffs are, I would not put the best of them on for all the wealth of London."

"Nor I," replied Leonard. "I shall make free, however, with a sword," he added, selecting one from the heap. "I may need a weapon."

"I require nothing more than my halbert," observed the smith; "and I would advise you to

throw away that velvet scabbard. It is a certain harbour for infection."

Leonard did not neglect the caution, and pushing open the door, they entered a large room which resembled an upholsterer's shop, being literally crammed with chairs, tables, cabinets, moveable cupboards, bedsteads, curtains, and hangings, all of the richest description.

"What I heard is true," observed Rainbird, gazing around in astonishment. "Chowles must have carried off everything he could lay hands upon. What can he do with all that furniture?"

"What the miser does with his store," replied Leonard: "feast his eyes with it, but never use it."

They then proceeded to the next room. It was crowded with books, looking-glasses, and pictures; many of them originally of great value, but greatly damaged by the careless manner in which they were piled one upon another. A third apartment was filled with flasks of wine, with casks probably containing spirits, and boxes, the contents of which they did not pause to examine. A fourth contained male and female habiliments, spread out like the dresses in a theatrical wardrobe. Most of these garments were of the gayest and costliest description, and of the latest fashion, and Leonard sighed as he looked upon them, and thought of the fate of those they had so lately adorned.

"There is contagion enough in those clothes to

infect a whole city," said Rainbird, who regarded them with different feelings. "I have half a mind to set fire to them."

"It were a good deed to do so," returned Leonard; "but it must not be done now. Let us go up stairs. These are the only rooms below."

Accordingly, they ascended the staircase, and entered chamber after chamber, all of which were as full of spoil as those they had just visited; but they could find no one, nor was there any symptom that the house was tenanted. They next stood still within the gallery, and listened intently for some sound to reveal those they sought, but all was as still and silent as the grave.

"We cannot be mistaken, observed Leonard. "It is clear this house is the receptacle for Chowles's plunder. Besides, we should not have found the lantern burning if they had gone forth again. No, no; they must be hidden somewhere, and I will not quit the place till I find them."

Their search, however, was fruitless. They mounted to the garrets, opened every door, and glanced into every corner. Still, no one was to be seen.

"I begin to think Nizza cannot be here," said the apprentice, "but I am resolved not to depart without questioning Chowles on the subject."

"You must first find him," rejoined Rainbird. "If he is anywhere, he must be in the cellar, for

we have been into every room in this part of the house. For my own part, I think you had better abandon the search altogether. No good will come of it."

Leonard, however, was not to be dissuaded, and they went down stairs. A short flight of stone steps brought them to a spacious kitchen, but it was quite empty, and seemed to have been long disused. They then peeped into the scullery adjoining, and were about to retrace their steps, when Rainbird plucked Leonard's sleeve to call his attention to a gleam of light issuing from a door which stood partly ajar, in a long narrow passage leading apparently to the cellars.

"They are there," he said, in a whisper.

"So I see," replied Leonard, in the same tone. And raising his finger to his lips in token of silence, he stole forward on the points of his feet and cautiously opened the door.

At the further end of the cellar — for such it was — knelt Chowles, examining with greedy eyes the contents of a large chest, which, from the hasty glance that Leonard caught of it, appeared to be filled with gold and silver plate. A link stuck against the wall threw a strong light over the scene, and showed that the coffin-maker was alone. As Leonard advanced, the sound of his footsteps caught Chowles's ear, and uttering a cry of surprise and alarm, he let fall the lid of the chest and sprang to his feet.

"What do you want?" he cried, looking uneasily round, as if in search of some weapon. "Are you come to rob me?"

"No," replied Leonard; "neither are we come to reclaim the plunder you have taken from others. We are come in search of Nizza Macascree."

"Then you have come on a fool's errand," replied Chowles, regaining his courage, "for she is not here. I know nothing of her."

"That is false," rejoined Leonard. "You have just conducted Sir Paul Parravicin to her."

This assertion on the part of the apprentice, which he thought himself justified under the circumstances in making, produced a strong effect on Chowles. He appeared startled and confounded.

"What right have you to play the spy upon me thus?" he faltered.

"The right that every honest man possesses to check the designs of the wicked," replied Leonard. "You admit that she is here. Lead me to her hiding-place without more ado."

"If you know where it is," rejoined Chowles, who now perceived the trick that had been practised upon him, "you will not want me to conduct you to it. Neither Nizza nor Sir Paul Parravicin are here."

"That is false, prevaricating scoundrel!" cried Leonard. "My companion and I saw you enter the house with your profligate employer. And as

we gained admittance a few minutes after you, it is certain no one can have left it. Lead me to Nizza's retreat instantly, or I will cut your throat."

And seizing Chowles by the collar, he held the point of his sword to his breast.

"Use no violence," cried Chowles, struggling to free himself, "and I will take you wherever you please. This way — this way."

And he motioned as if he would take them up stairs.

"Do not think to mislead me, villain," cried Leonard, tightening his grasp. "We have searched every room in the upper part of the house, and though we have discovered the whole of your ill-gotten hoards, we have found nothing else. No one is there."

"Well, then," rejoined Chowles, "since the truth must out, Sir Paul is in the next house. But it is his own abode. I have nothing to do with it, nothing whatever. He is accountable for his own actions, and you will be accountable to *him* if you intrude upon his privacy. Release me, and I swear to conduct you to him. But you will take the consequences of your rashness upon yourself. I only go upon compulsion."

"I am ready to take any consequences," replied Leonard, resolutely.

"Come along, then," said Chowles, pointing down the passage.

"You mean us no mischief?" cried Leonard,

suspiciously. "If you do, the attempt will cost you your life."

Chowles made no answer, but moved along the passage as quickly as Leonard, who kept fast hold of him, and walked by his side, would permit. Presently, they reached a door, which neither the apprentice nor Rainbird had observed before, and which admitted them into an extensive vault, with a short staircase at the further end, communicating with a passage that Leonard did not require to be informed was in another house.

Here Chowles paused.

"I think it right to warn you you are running into a danger from which ere long you will be glad to draw back, young man," he said to the apprentice. "As a friend, I advise you to proceed no further in the matter."

"Waste no more time in talking," cried Leonard, fiercely, and forcing him forward as he spoke, "where is Nizza? Lead me to her without an instant's delay."

"A wilful man must have his way," returned Chowles, hurrying up the main staircase. "It is not my fault if any harm befals you."

They had just gained the landing when a door on the right was suddenly thrown open, and Sir Paul Parravicin stood before them. He looked surprised and startled at the sight of the apprentice, and angrily demanded his business.

"I am come for Nizza Macascree," replied

Leonard, "whom you and Chowles have detained against her will."

Parravicin glanced sternly and inquiringly at the coffin-maker.

"I have protested to him that she is not here, Sir Paul," said the latter, "but he will not believe me, and has compelled me by threats of taking my life, to bring him and his companion to you."

"Then take them back again," rejoined Parravicin, turning haughtily upon his heel.

"That answer will not suffice, Sir Paul," cried Leonard — "I will not depart without her."

"How!" exclaimed the Knight, drawing his sword. "Do you dare to intrude upon my presence. Begone, or I will punish your presumption." And he prepared to attack the apprentice.

"Advance a footstep," rejoined Leonard, who had never relinquished his grasp of Chowles, "and I pass my sword through this man's body. Speak, villain," he continued, in a tone so formidable that the coffin-maker shook with apprehension, — "is she here or not?"

Chowles gazed from him to the Knight, whose deportment was equally menacing, and appeared bewildered with terror.

"It is needless," said Leonard, "your looks answer for you. She *is*."

"Yes, yes, I confess she is," replied Chowles.

"You hear what he says, Sir Paul," remarked Leonard.

"His fears would make him assert anything," rejoined Parravicin, disdainfully. "If you do not depart instantly, I will drive you forth."

"Sir Paul Parravicin," rejoined Leonard, in an authoritative tone, "I command you, in the King's name, to deliver up this girl."

Parravicin laughed scornfully.

"The King has no authority here," he said.

"Pardon me, Sir Paul," rejoined Chowles, who began to be seriously alarmed at his own situation, and eagerly grasped at the opportunity that offered of extricating himself from it, — "pardon me. If it is the King's pleasure she should be removed, it materially alters the case, and I can be no party to her detention."

"Both you and your employer will incur his Majesty's severest displeasure by detaining her after this notice," remarked Leonard.

"Before I listen to the young man's request, let him declare that it is his intention to deliver her up to the King," rejoined Parravicin, coldly.

"It is my intention to deliver her up to one who has the best right to take charge of her," returned Leonard.

"You mean her father?" sneered Parravicin.

"Ay, but not the person you suppose to be her father," replied Leonard. "An important

discovery has been made respecting her parentage."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Parravicin, with a look of surprise. "Who has the honour to be her father?"

"A gentleman named Thirlby," replied Leonard.

"What!" cried Parravicin, starting, and turning pale. "Did you say Thirlby?"

The apprentice reiterated his assertion.

Parravicin uttered a deep groan, and pressed his hand forcibly against his brow for some moments, during which the apprentice watched him narrowly. He then controlled himself by a powerful effort, and returned his sword to its scabbard.

"Come into this room, young man," he said to the apprentice, "and let your companion remain outside with Chowles. Fear nothing. I intend you no injury."

"I do not distrust you," replied Leonard, "and if I did, should have no apprehension."

And motioning Rainbird to remain where he was, he entered the room with the Knight, who instantly closed the door.

Parravicin's first proceeding was to question him as to his reasons for supposing Nizza to be Thirlby's daughter, and clearly perceiving the deep interest his interrogator took in the matter, and the favourable change that, from some unknown cause, had been wrought in his sentiments, the apprentice

did not think fit to hide anything from him. Parravicin's agitation increased as he listened to the recital; and at last, overcome by emotion, he sank into a chair, and covered his face with his hands. Recovering himself in a short time, he arose, and began to pace the chamber to and fro.

"What I have told you seems to have disturbed you, Sir Paul," remarked Leonard. "May I ask the cause of your agitation?"

"No, man, you may not," replied Parravicin angrily. And then suddenly checking himself, he added, with forced calmness, "And so you parted with Mr. Thirlby on London Bridge, and you think he will return to Doctor Hodges's residence in Watling Street?"

"I am sure of it," replied Leonard.

"I must see him without delay," rejoined Parravicin.

"I will take you to him," remarked Leonard; "but first I must see Nizza."

Parravicin walked to a table, on which stood a small silver bell, and ringing it, the summons was immediately answered by an old woman. He was about to deliver a message to her, when the disturbed expression of her countenance struck him, and he hastily inquired the cause of it.

"You must not see the young lady to-night, Sir Paul," said the old woman.

"Why not?" demanded the knight, hastily. "Why not?"

"Because,—but you frighten me so that I dare not speak," was the answer.

"I will frighten you still more if you keep me in this state of suspense," rejoined Parravicin, furiously. "Is she ill?"

"I fear she has got the plague," returned the old woman. "Now you can see her if you think proper."

"*I* will see her," said Leonard. "I have no fear of infection."

The old woman looked hard at Parravicin, as if awaiting his orders.

"Yes, yes, you can take him to her room," said the Knight, who seemed completely overpowered by the intelligence, "if he chooses to go thither. But why do you suppose it is the plague?"

"One cannot well be deceived in a seizure of that kind," replied the old woman, shaking her head.

"I thought the disorder never attacked the same person twice," said Parravicin.

"I myself am an instance to the contrary," replied Leonard.

"And, as you have twice recovered, there may be a chance for Nizza," said Parravicin. "This old woman will take you to her. I will hasten to Doctor Hodges's residence, and if I should fail in meeting him, will not rest till I procure assistance elsewhere. Do not leave her till I return."

Leonard readily gave a promise to the desired

effect, and accompanying him to the door, told Rainbird what had happened. The latter agreed to wait below to render any assistance that might be required, and went down stairs with Parravicin and Chowles. The two latter instantly quitted the house together, and hastened to Watling Street.

With a beating heart, Leonard then followed the old woman to Nizza's chamber. They had to pass through a small ante-room, the door of which was carefully locked. The suite of apartments occupied by the captive girl were exquisitely and luxuriously furnished, and formed a striking contrast to the rest of the house. The air was loaded with perfumes; choice pictures adorned the walls; and the tables were covered with books and china ornaments. The windows, however, were strictly barred, and every precaution appeared to be taken to prevent an attempt at escape. Leonard cast an anxious look round as he entered the ante-room, and its luxurious air filled him with anxiety. His conductress, however, did not allow him time for reflection, but led him into another room, still more richly furnished than the first, and lighted by a large coloured lamp, that shed a warm glow around it. An old dwarfed African, in a fantastic dress, and with a large scimetar stuck in his girdle, stepped forward on their approach, and shook his head significantly.

"He is dumb," said the old woman, "but his

gestures are easy to be understood. He means that Nizza is worse."

Leonard heaved a deep sigh.

Passing into a third room, they perceived the poor girl stretched on a couch placed in a recess at one side. She heard their footsteps, and without raising her head, or looking towards them, said, in a weak but determined voice — "Tell your master I will see him no more. The plague has again attacked me, and I am glad of it, for it will deliver me from him. It will be useless to offer me any remedies, for I will not take them."

"It is not Sir Paul Parravicin," replied the old woman. "I have brought a stranger, with whose name I am unacquainted, to see you."

"Then you have done very wrong," replied Nizza. "I will see no one."

"Not even me, Nizza?" asked Leonard, advancing.

The poor girl started at the sound of his voice, and raising herself on one arm, looked wildly towards him. As soon as she was satisfied that her fancy had not deceived her, she uttered a cry of delight, and falling backwards on the couch, became insensible.

Leonard and the old woman instantly flew to the poor girl's assistance, and restoratives being applied, she speedily opened her eyes, and fixed them tenderly and inquiringly on the apprentice. Before replying to her mute interrogatories, Leo-

nard requested the old woman to leave them,—an order very reluctantly obeyed,—and as soon as they were left alone, proceeded to explain, as briefly as he could, the manner in which he had discovered her place of captivity. Nizza listened to his recital with the greatest interest, and though evidently suffering acute pain, uttered no complaint, but endeavoured to assume an appearance of composure and tranquillity.

"I must now tell you all that has befallen me since we last met," she said, as he concluded. "I will not dwell upon the persecution I endured from the King, whose passion increased in proportion to my resistance,—I will not dwell upon the arts, the infamous arts, used to induce me to comply with his wishes,—neither will I dwell upon the desperate measure I had determined to resort to, if driven to the last strait,—nor would I mention the subject at all, except to assure you I escaped contamination, where few escape it."

"You need not give me any such assurance," remarked Leonard.

"While I was thus almost driven to despair," pursued Nizza, "a young female, who attended me, and affected to deplore my situation, offered to help me to escape. I eagerly embraced the offer; and one night, having purloined, as she stated, the key of the chamber in which I was lodged, she conducted me by a back staircase into the palace gardens. Thinking myself free, I warmly thanked

my supposed deliverer, who hurried me towards a gate, at which she informed me a man was waiting to guide me to a cottage about a mile from the city, where I should be in perfect safety."

"I see the device," cried Leonard. "But why —why did you trust her?"

"What could I do?" rejoined Nizza. "To stay was as bad as to fly, and might have been worse. At all events, I had no distrust. My companion opened the gate, and called to some person without. It was profoundly dark; but I could perceive a carriage, or some other vehicle, at a little distance. Alarmed at the sight, I whispered my fears to my companion, and would have retreated; but she laid hold of my hand, and detained me. The next moment, I felt a rude grasp upon my arm. Before I could cry out, a hand was placed over my mouth so closely as almost to stifle me; and I was forced into the carriage by two persons, who seated themselves on either side of me, threatening to put me to death if I made the slighest noise. The carriage was then driven off at a furious pace. For some miles it pursued the high road, and then struck into a lane, where, in consequence of the deep and dangerous ruts, the driver was obliged to relax his speed. But in spite of all his caution, one of the wheels sunk into a hole, and in the efforts to extricate it, the carriage was overturned. No injury was sustained either by me or the others inside, and, the door

being forced open without much difficulty, we were let out. One of my captors kept near me, while the other lent his assistance to the coachman to set the carriage to-rights. It proved, however, to be so much damaged, that it could not proceed; and after considerable delay, my conductors ordered the coachman to remain with it till further assistance could be sent; and, taking the horses, one of them, notwithstanding my resistance, placed me beside him, and galloped off. Having ridden about five miles, we crossed an extensive common, and passed an avenue of trees, which brought us to the entrance of an old house. Our arrival seemed to be expected; for the instant we appeared the gate was opened, and the old woman you have just seen, and who is called Mrs. Carteret, together with a dumb African, named Hassan, appeared at it. Some muttered discourse passed between my conductors and these persons, which ended in my being committed to the care of Mrs. Carteret, who led me up-stairs to a richly-furnished chamber, and urged me to take some refreshment before I retired to rest, which, however, I declined."

"Still you saw nothing of Sir Paul Parravicin?" asked Leonard.

"On going down stairs next morning, he was the first person I beheld," replied Nizza. "Falling upon his knees, he implored my pardon for the artifice he had practised, and said he had

been compelled to have recourse to it in order to save me from the King. He then began to plead his own suit; but finding his protestations of passion of no effect, he became yet more importunate; when, at this juncture, one of the men, who had acted as my conductor on the previous night, suddenly entered the room, and told him he must return to Oxford without an instant's delay, as the King's attendants were in search of him. Casting a look at me that made me tremble, he then departed; and though I remained more than two months in that house, I saw nothing more of him."

"Did you not attempt to escape during that time?" asked Leonard.

"I was so carefully watched by Mrs. Carteret and Hassan that it would have been vain to attempt it," she replied. "About a week ago, the two men who had conducted me to my place of captivity again made their appearance, and told me I must accompany them to London. I attempted no resistance, well aware it would be useless; and as the journey was made by by-roads, three days elapsed before we reached the capital. We arrived at night, and I almost forgot my own alarm in the terrible sights I beheld at every turn. It would have been useless to call out for assistance, for there was no one to afford it. I asked my conductors if they had brought me there to die, and they answered sternly, 'It depended on

myself.' At Ludgate we met Chowles, the coffin-maker, and he brought us to this house. Yesterday, Sir Paul Parravicin made his appearance, and told me he had brought me hither to be out of the King's way. He then renewed his odious solicitations. I resisted him as firmly as before; but he was more determined, and I might have been reduced to the last extremity but for your arrival, or for the terrible disorder that has seized me. But I have spoken enough of myself. Tell me what has become of Amabel?"

"She too has got the plague," replied Leonard, mournfully.

"Alas! alas!" cried Nizza, bursting into tears —"she is so dear to you, that I grieve for her far more than for myself."

"I have not seen her since I last beheld you," said Leonard, greatly touched by the poor girl's devotion. "She was carried off by the Earl of Rochester on the same night that you were taken from Kingston Lisle by the King."

"And she has been in his power ever since?" demanded Nizza, eagerly.

"Ever since," repeated Leonard.

"The same Power that has watched over me I trust has protected her," cried Nizza, fervently.

"I cannot doubt it," replied Leonard. "She would not now be alive were it otherwise. But I have now something of importance to disclose to you. You remember the stranger we met near

the plague-pit in Finsbury-fields, and whose child I buried?"

"Perfectly," replied Nizza.

"What if I tell you he is your father?" said Leonard.

"What!" cried Nizza, in the utmost surprise. "Have I then been mistaken all these years, in supposing the piper to be my father?"

"You have," replied Leonard. "I cannot explain more to you at present, but a few hours will reveal all. Thirlby is the name of your father. Have you ever heard it before?"

"Never," returned Nizza. "It is strange what you tell me. I have often reproached myself for not feeling a stronger affection for the piper, who always treated me with the kindness of a parent. But it now seems the true instinct was wanting. Tell me your reasons for supposing this person to be my father."

As Leonard was about to reply, the door was opened by Mrs. Carteret, who said that Sir Paul Parravicin had just returned with Doctor Hodges and another gentleman. The words were scarcely uttered, when Thirlby rushed into the room, and flinging himself on his knees before the couch, cried — "At last I have found you, — my child! my child!"

The surprise which Nizza must have experienced at such an address was materially lessened by what Leonard had just told her, and after earn-

estly regarding the stranger for some time, she exclaimed, in a gentle voice, " My father ! "

Thirlby sprang to his feet, and would have folded her in his arms, if Doctor Hodges, who by this time had reached the couch, had not prevented him.

" Touch her not, or you destroy yourself," he cried.

" I care not if I do," rejoined Thirlby. " The gratification would be cheaply purchased at the price of my life, and if I could preserve hers by the sacrifice, I would gladly make it."

" No more of this," cried Hodges, impatiently, " or you will defeat any attempt I may make to cure her. You had better not remain here. Your presence agitates her."

Gazing wistfully at his daughter, and scarcely able to tear himself away, Thirlby yielded at last to the Doctor's advice, and quitted the room. He was followed by Leonard, who received a hint to the same effect. On reaching the adjoining room, they found Sir Paul Parravicin walking to and fro in an agitated manner. He immediately came up to Thirlby, and in an anxious but deferential tone, inquired how he had found Nizza. The latter shook his head, and sternly declining any further conversation, passed on with the apprentice into an outer room. He then flung himself into a chair, and appeared lost in deep and bitter reflection. Leonard was unwilling to dis-

turb him, but at last his own anxieties compelled him to break silence.

"Can you tell me ought of Amabel?" he asked.

"Alas! no," replied Thirlby, rousing himself. "I have had no time to inquire about her, as you shall hear. After leaving you on the bridge, I went into Southwark, and hurrying through all the principal streets, inquired from every watchman I met whether he had seen any person answering to Doctor Hodges's description, but could hear nothing of him. At last, I gave up the quest, and retracing my steps, was proceeding along Cannon Street, when I descried a person a little in advance of me, whom I thought must be the Doctor, and calling out to him, found I was not mistaken. I had just reached him when two other persons turned the corner of Nicholas Lane. On seeing us, one of them ran up to the Doctor, exclaiming, 'By heaven, the very person I want!' It was Sir Paul Parravicin, and he instantly explained his errand. Imagine the feelings with which I heard his account of the illness of my daughter. Imagine, also, the horror I must have experienced in recognising in her persecutor my ——."

The sentence was not completed, for at that moment the door was opened by Sir Paul Parravicin, who, advancing towards Thirlby, begged, in the same deferential tone as before to have a few words with him.

"I might well refuse you," replied Thirlby, sternly, "but it is necessary we should have some explanation of what has occurred."

"It is," rejoined Parravicin, "and, therefore, I have sought you."

Thirlby arose, and accompanied the Knight into the outer room, closing the door after him. More than a quarter of an hour, — it seemed an age to Leonard, — elapsed, and still no one came. Listening intently, he heard voices in the next room. They were loud and angry as if in quarrel. Then all was quiet, and at last Thirlby reappeared, and took a seat beside him.

"Have you seen Doctor Hodges?" inquired the apprentice, eagerly.

"I have," replied Thirlby — "and he speaks favourably of my poor child. He has administered all needful remedies, but as it is necessary to watch their effect, he will remain with her some time longer."

"And, meanwhile, I shall know nothing of Amabel," cried Leonard, in a tone of bitter disappointment.

"Your anxiety is natural," returned Thirlby, "but you may rest satisfied, if Doctor Hodges has seen her, he has done all that human aid can effect. But as you must perforce wait his coming forth, I will endeavour to beguile the tedious interval by relating to you so much of my history as refers to Nizza Macascree."

After a brief pause, he commenced.

"You must know, then, that in my youth I became desperately enamoured of a lady named Isabella Morley. She was most beautiful — but I need not enlarge upon her attractions, since you have beheld her very image in Nizza. When I first met her she was attached to another, but I soon rid myself of my rival. I quarrelled with him, and slew him in a duel. After a long and urgent suit, for the successful issue of which I was mainly indebted to my rank and wealth, which gave great influence with her parents, Isabella became mine. But I soon found out she did not love me. In consequence of this discovery, I became madly jealous, and embittered her life and my own by my constant, and I now know too well, groundless suspicions. She had borne me a son, and in the excesses of my jealous fury, fancying the child was not my own, I threatened to put it to death. This violence led to the unhappy result I am about to relate. Another child was born, a daughter—need I say Nizza, or, to give her her proper name, Isabella, for she was so christened after her mother,— and one night—one luckless night, maddened by some causeless doubt, I snatched the innocent babe from her mother's arms, and if I had not been prevented by the attendants, who rushed into the room on hearing their mistress's shrieks, should have destroyed her. After awhile, I became pacified, and on reviewing my conduct more calmly on the morrow, bitterly re-

proached myself, and hastened to express my penitence to my wife. 'You will never have an opportunity of repeating your violence,' she said; 'the object of your cruel and unfounded suspicions is gone.'—'Gone!' I exclaimed; 'whither?' And as I spoke I looked around the chamber. But the babe was nowhere to be seen. In answer to my inquiries, my wife admitted she had caused her to be removed to a place of safety, but refused, even on my most urgent entreaties, accompanied by promises of amended conduct, to tell me where. I next interrogated the servants, but they professed entire ignorance of the matter. For three whole days I made ineffectual search for the child, and offered large rewards to any one who would bring her to me. But they failed to produce her; and repairing to my wife's chamber, I threatened her with the most terrible consequences if she persisted in her vindictive project. She defied me, and, transported with rage, I passed my sword through her body, exclaiming, as I dealt the murderous blow, 'You have sent the brat to her father — to your lover, madam.' Horror and remorse seized me the moment I had committed the ruthless act, and I should have turned my sword against myself, if I had not been stayed by the cry of my poor victim, who implored me to hold my hand. 'Do not add crime to crime,' she cried; 'you have done me grievous wrong. I have not, indeed, loved you, because my affec-

tions were not under my control, but I have been ever true to you, and this I declare with my latest breath. I freely forgive you, and pray God to turn your heart.' And with these words, she expired. I was roused from the stupefaction into which I was thrown by the appearance of the servants. Heaping execrations upon me, they strove to seize me; but I broke through them, and gained a garden at the back of my mansion, which was situated on the banks of the Thames, not far from Chelsea. This garden ran down to the river side, and was defended by a low wall, which I leaped, and plunged into the stream. A boat was instantly sent in pursuit of me, and a number of persons ran along the banks, all eager for my capture. But being an excellent swimmer, I contrived to elude them, and as I never appeared again, it was supposed I was drowned."

"And Nizza, or, as I ought now to call her, Isabella, was confided I suppose to the piper?" inquired Leonard.

"She was confided to his helpmate," replied Thirlby, "who had been nurse to my wife. Mike Macascree was one of my father's servants, and was in his younger days a merry, worthless fellow. The heavy calamity under which he now labours had not then befallen him. On taking charge of my daughter, his wife received certain papers substantiating the child's origin, together with a miniature, and a small golden amulet. The

papers and miniature were delivered by her on her death-bed to the piper, who showed them to me to-night."

"And the amulet I myself have seen," remarked Leonard.

"To resume my own history," said Thirlby — "after the dreadful catastrophe I have related, I remained concealed in London for some months, and was glad to find the report of my death generally believed. I then passed over into Holland, where I remained for several years, in the course of which time I married the widow of a rich merchant, who died soon after our union, leaving me one child."

And he covered his hands to hide his emotion. After a while, he proceeded —

"Having passed many years as peacefully as one whose conscience was so heavily burdened as mine could hope to pass them in Amsterdam, I, last summer brought my daughter, around whom my affections were closely twined, to London, and took up my abode in the eastern environs of the city. There again I was happy — too happy! — until at last the plague came — but why should I relate the rest of my sad story," he added, in a voice suffocated with emotion — "you know it as well as I do."

"You said you had a son," observed Leonard, after a pause — "Is he yet living?"

"He is," replied Thirlby, a shade passing over

his countenance. "On my return to England, I communicated to him through Judith Malmayns, who is my foster-sister, that I was still alive, telling him the name I had adopted, and adding, I should never disturb him in the possession of his title and estates."

"Title!" exclaimed Leonard.

"Ay, title!" echoed Thirlby. "The title I once bore was that of Lord Argentine."

"I am glad to hear it," said Leonard, "for I began to fear Sir Paul Parravicin was your son."

"Sir Paul Parravicin, or, rather, the Lord Argentine, for such is his rightful title, *is* my son," returned Thirlby; "and I lament to own I am his father. When among his worthless associates, — nay, even with the King, — he drops the higher title, and assumes that by which you have known him, and it is well he does so, for his actions are sufficient to tarnish a far nobler name than that he bears. Owing to this disguise I knew not he was the person who carried off my daughter. But, thank heaven! another, and fouler crime, has been spared us. All these things have been strangely explained to me to-night. And thus you see, young man, the poor piper's daughter turns out to be the Lady Isabella Argentine."

Before an answer could be returned, the door was opened by Hodges, and both starting to their feet, hurried towards him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TRIALS OF AMABEL.

It will now be necessary to return to the period of Amabel's abduction from Kingston Lisle. The shawl thrown over her head prevented her cries from being heard; and notwithstanding her struggles, she was placed on horseback before a powerful man, who galloped off with her along the Wantage Road. After proceeding at a rapid pace for about two miles, her conductor came to a halt, and she could distinguish the sound of other horsemen approaching. At first, she hoped it might prove a rescue. But she was quickly undeceived. The shawl was removed, and she beheld the Earl of Rochester, accompanied by Pillichody, and some half-dozen mounted attendants. The Earl would have transferred her to his own steed, but she offered such determined resistance to the arrangement, that he was compelled to content himself with riding by her side. All his efforts to engage her in conversation were equally unsuccessful. She made no reply to his remarks, but averted her gaze from him; and, whenever he approached,

shrank from him with abhorrence. The Earl, however, was not easily repulsed, but continued his attentions and discourse, as if both had been favourably received.

In this way they proceeded for some miles, one of the Earl's attendants, who was well acquainted with the country, being, in fact, a native of it, serving as their guide. They had quitted the Wantage Road, and leaving that ancient town, renowned as the birth-place of the great Alfred on the right, had taken the direction of Abingdon and Oxford. It was a lovely evening, and their course led them through many charming places. But the dreariest waste would have been as agreeable as the richest prospect to Amabel. She noted neither the broad meadows, yet white from the scythe, nor the corn-fields waving with their deep and abundant, though yet immature crops; nor did she cast even a passing glance at any of those green spots which every lane offers, and upon which the eye of the traveller ordinarily delights to linger. She rode beneath a natural avenue of trees, whose branches met over-head like the arches of a cathedral, and was scarcely conscious of their pleasant shade. She heard neither the song of the wooing thrush, nor the cry of the startled blackbird, nor the evening hymn of the soaring lark. Alike to her was the gorse-covered common, along which they swiftly speeded, and the steep hillside up which they more swiftly mounted. She

breathed not the delicious fragrance of the new-mown hay, nor listened to the distant lowing herds, the bleating sheep, or the cawing rooks. She thought of nothing but her perilous situation,—heard nothing but the voice of Rochester,—felt nothing but the terror inspired by his presence.

As the Earl did not desire to pass through any village if he could help it, his guide led them along the most unfrequented roads; but, in spite of his caution, an interruption occurred which had nearly resulted in Amabel's deliverance. While threading a narrow lane, they came suddenly upon a troop of haymakers, in a field on the right, who, up to that moment, had been hidden from view by the high hedges. On seeing them, Amabel screamed loudly for assistance, and was instantly answered by their shouts. Rochester ordered his men to gallop forward, but the road winding round the meadow, the haymakers were enabled to take a shorter cut and intercept them. Leaping the hedge, a stout fellow rushed towards Amabel's conductor, and seized the bridle of his steed. He was followed by two others, who would have instantly liberated the captive girl, if the Earl had not, with great presence of mind, cried out, "Touch her not, as you value your lives! She is ill of the plague!"

At this formidable announcement, which operated like magic upon Amabel's defenders, and made them fall back more quickly than the wea-

pons of the Earl's attendants could have done, they retreated, and communicating their fears to their comrades, who were breaking through the hedge in all directions, and hurrying to their aid, the whole band took to their heels, and regardless of Amabel's continued shrieks, never stopped till they supposed themselves out of reach of infection. The Earl was thus at liberty to pursue his way unmolested, and laughing heartily at the success of his stratagem, and at the consternation he had created among the haymakers, pressed forward.

Nothing further occurred, till, in crossing the little river Ock, near Lyford, the horse ridden by Amabel's conductor missed its footing, and precipitated them both into the water. No ill consequences followed the accident. Throwing himself into the shallow stream, Rochester seized Amabel, and placed her beside him on his own steed. A deathly paleness overspread her countenance, and a convulsion shook her frame as she was thus brought into contact with the Earl, who, fearing the immersion might prove dangerous in her present delicate state of health, quickened his pace to procure assistance. Before he had proceeded a hundred yards, Amabel fainted. Gazing at her with admiration, and pressing her inanimate frame to his breast, Rochester imprinted a passionate kiss on her cheek.

"By my soul!" he mentally ejaculated, "I never thought I could be so desperately enamoured.

I would not part with her for the crown of these realms."

While considering whither he should take her, and much alarmed at her situation, the man who acted as guide came to his relief. Halting till the Earl came up, he said, "If you want assistance for the young lady, my lord, I can take you to a good country inn, not far from this, where she will be well attended to, and where, as it is kept by my father, I can answer that no questions will be asked."

"Precisely what I wish, Sherborne," replied Rochester. "We will halt there for the night. Ride on as fast as you can."

Sherborne struck spurs into his steed, and passing Kingston Bagpuze, reached the high road between Abingdon and Faringdon, at the corner of which stood the inn in question,—a good-sized habitation, with large stables and a barn attached to it. Here he halted, and calling out in a loud and authoritative voice, the landlord instantly answered the summons; and on being informed by his son of the rank of his guest, doffed his cap, and hastened to assist the Earl to dismount. But Rochester declined his services, and bidding him summon his wife, she shortly afterwards made her appearance in the shape of a stout middle-aged dame. Committing Amabel to her care, the Earl then alighted, and followed them into the house.

The Plough, for so the inn was denominated, was

thrown into the utmost confusion by the arrival of the Earl and his suite. All the ordinary frequenters of the inn were ejected, while the best parlour was instantly prepared for the accommodation of his lordship and Pillichody. But Rochester was far more anxious for Amabel than himself, and could not rest for a moment till assured by Dame Sherborne that she was restored to sensibility, and about to retire to rest. He then became easy, and sat down to supper with Pillichody. So elated was he by his success, that, yielding to his natural inclination for hard drinking, he continued to revel so freely and so long with his follower, that daybreak found them over their wine, the one toasting the grocer's daughter and the other Patience, when they both staggered off to bed.

A couple of hours sufficed Rochester to sleep off the effects of his carouse. At six o'clock he arose, and ordered his attendants to prepare to set out without delay. When all was ready, he sent for Amabel, but she refused to come down stairs, and finding his repeated messages of no avail he rushed into her room, and bore her, shrieking, to his steed.

In an hour after this, they arrived at an old hall, belonging to the Earl, in the neighbourhood of Oxford. Amabel was entrusted to the care of a female attendant, named Prudence, and towards evening, Rochester, who was burning with impatience for an interview, learnt, to his infinite dis-

appointment, that she was so seriously unwell, that if he forced himself into her presence her life might be placed in jeopardy. She continued in the same state for several days, at the end of which time the chirurgeon who attended her, and who was a creature of the Earl's, pronounced her out of danger. Rochester then sent her word by Prudence that he must see her in the course of that day, and a few hours after the delivery of the message, he sought her room. She was much enfeebled by illness, but received him with great self-possession.

"I cannot believe, my lord," she said, "that you desire to destroy me, and when I assure you — solemnly assure you, that if you continue to persecute me thus, my death will be the consequence, I am persuaded you will desist, and suffer me to depart."

"Amabel," rejoined the Earl, passionately, — "is it possible you can be so changed towards me? Nothing now interferes to prevent our union."

"Except my own determination to the contrary, my lord," she replied, "I can never be yours."

"Wherefore not?" asked the Earl, half angrily, half reproachfully.

"Because I know and feel that I should condemn myself to wretchedness," she replied. "Because, for since your lordship will force the truth from me, I must speak out, — I have learnt to regard your character in its true light, — and because my heart is wedded to heaven."

"Pshaw!" exclaimed the Earl, contemptuously; "you have been listening so long to your saintly father's discourses, that you fancy them applicable to yourself. But you are mistaken in me," he added, altering his tone; "I see where the main difficulty lies. You think I am about to delude you, as before, into a mock marriage. But I swear to you you are mistaken. I love you so well that I would risk my temporal and eternal happiness for you. It will rejoice me to raise you to my own rank — to place you among the radiant beauties of our sovereign's court, the brightest of whom you will outshine, and to devote my whole life to your happiness."

"It is too late," sighed Amabel.

"Why too late?" cried the Earl, imploringly. "We have gone through severe trials, it is true. I have been constantly baffled in my pursuit of you, but disappointment has only made me love you more devotedly. Why too late? What is to prevent our nuptials from taking place to-day — to-morrow — when you will? The King himself shall be present at the ceremony, and shall give you away. Will this satisfy your scruples? I know I have offended you. I know I deserve your anger. But the love that prompted me to act thus, must also plead my pardon."

"Strengthen me!" she murmured, looking supplicatingly upwards. "Strengthen me, for my trial is very severe."

"Be not deceived, Amabel," continued Rochester, yet more ardently; "that you love me I am well assured, however strongly you may at this moment persuade yourself to the contrary. Be not governed by your father's straight-laced and puritanical opinions. Men, such as he is, cannot judge of fiery natures like mine. I myself have had to conquer a stubborn and rebellious spirit,—the demon pride. But I have conquered. Love has achieved the victory,—love for you. I offer you my heart, my hand, my title. A haughty noble makes this offer to a grocer's daughter. Can you — will you refuse me?"

"I can and do, my lord," she replied. "I have achieved a yet harder victory. With me, principle has conquered love. I no longer respect, you, no longer love you — and, therefore, cannot wed you."

"Rash and obstinate girl," cried the Earl, unable to conceal his mortification; "you will bitterly repent your inconsiderate conduct. I offer you devotion such as no other person could offer you, and rank such as no other is likely to offer you. You are now in my power, and you *shall* be mine,— in what way rests with yourself. You shall have a week to consider the matter. At the end of that time, I will again renew my proposal. If you accept it, well and good. If not, you know the alternative."

And without waiting for a reply, he quitted the room.

He was as good as his word. During the whole of the week allowed Amabel for consideration, he never intruded upon her, nor was his name at any time mentioned by her attendants. If she had been, indeed, Countess of Rochester, she could not have been treated with greater respect than was shown her. The apartment allotted her opened upon a large garden, surrounded by high walls, and she walked within it daily. Her serenity of mind remained undisturbed; her health visibly improved; and, what was yet more surprising, she entirely recovered her beauty. The whole of her time not devoted to exercise, was spent in reading, or in prayer.

On the appointed day, Rochester presented himself. She received him with the most perfect composure, and with a bland look, from which he augured favourably. He waved his hand to the attendants, and they were alone.

"I came for your answer, Amabel," he said; "but I scarcely require it, being convinced from your looks that I have nothing to fear. Oh! why did you not abridge this tedious interval? Why not inform me you had altered your mind? But I will not reproach you. I am too happy to complain of the delay."

"I must undeceive you, my lord," returned Amabel, gravely. "No change has taken place in my feelings. I still adhere to the resolution I had come to when we last parted."

"How!" exclaimed the Earl, his countenance darkening, and the evil look which Amabel had before noticed taking possession of it. "One moment lured on, and next rebuffed. But no — no!" he added, constraining himself, "you cannot mean it. It is not in woman's nature to act thus. You have loved me — you love me still. Make me happy — make yourself happy."

"My lord," she replied, "strange and unnatural as my conduct may appear, you will find it consistent. You have lost the sway you once had over me, and for the reasons I have already given you, I can never be yours."

"Oh, recall your words, Amabel," he cried in the most moving tones he could command, "if you have no regard for me — at least have compassion. I will quit the court if you desire it; will abandon title, rank, wealth; and live in the humblest station with you. You know not what I am capable of when under the dominion of passion. I am capable of the darkest crimes, or of the brightest virtues. The woman who has a man's heart in her power may mould it to her own purposes, be they good or ill. Reject me, and you drive me to despair, and plunge me into guilt. Accept me, and you may lead me into any course you please."

"Were I assured of this—" cried Amabel.

"Rest assured of it," returned the Earl, passionately. "Oh, yield to impulses of natural af-

fection, and do not suffer a cold and calculating creed to chill your better feelings. How many a warm and loving heart has been so frozen! Do not let yours be one of them. Be mine! be mine!"

Amabel looked at him earnestly for a moment; while he, assured that he had gained his point, could not conceal a slightly triumphant smile.

"Now, your answer!" he cried. "My life hangs upon it."

"I am still unmoved," she replied, coldly, and firmly.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Earl with a terrible imprecation, and starting to his feet. "You refuse me. Be it so. But think not that you shall escape me. No, you are in my power, and I will use it. You shall be mine, and without the priest's interference. I will not degrade myself by an alliance with one so lowly born. The strongest love is nearest allied to hatred, and mine has become hatred — bitter hatred. You shall be mine, I tell you, and when I am become indifferent to you, I will cast you off. Then, when you are neglected, despised, shunned, you will regret — deeply but unavailingly, — your rejection of my proposals."

"No, my lord, I shall never regret it," replied Amabel, "and I cannot sufficiently rejoice that I did not yield to the momentary weakness that inclined me to accept them. I thank you for the

insight you have afforded me into your character."

"You have formed an erroneous opinion of me, Amabel," cried the Earl, seeing his error, and trying to correct it. I am well nigh distracted by conflicting emotions. Oh, forgive my violence;—forget it."

"Readily," she replied; "but think not I attach the least credit to your professions."

"Away, then, with further disguise," returned the Earl, relapsing into his furious mood, "and recognise in me the person I am,—or rather the person you would have me be. You say you are immovable. So am I; nor will I further delay my purpose."

Amabel, who had watched him uneasily during this speech, retreated a step, and taking a small dagger from a handkerchief in which she kept it concealed, placed its point against her breast.

"I well know whom I have to deal with, my lord," she said, "and am, therefore, provided against the last extremity. Attempt to touch me, and I plunge this dagger into my heart."

"Your sense of religion will not allow you to commit so desperate a deed," replied the Earl, derisively.

"My blood be upon your head, my lord," she rejoined; "for it is your hand that strikes the blow, and not my own. My honour is dearer to me than life, and I will unhesitatingly sacrifice the

one to preserve the other. I have no fear but that the action, wrongful though it be, will be forgiven me."

"Hold!" exclaimed the Earl, seeing from her determined look and manner that she would unquestionably execute her purpose. "I have no desire to drive you to destruction. Think over what I have said to you, and we will renew the subject to-morrow."

"Renew it when you please, my lord, my answer will still be the same," she replied. "I have but one refuge from you — the grave, and thither, if need be, I will fly."

And as she spoke, she moved slowly towards the adjoining chamber, the door of which she fastened after her.

"I thought I had some experience of her sex," said Rochester to himself, "but I find I was mistaken. To-morrow's mood, however, may be unlike to-day's. At all events, I must take my measures differently."

CHAPTER V.

THE MARRIAGE AND ITS CONSEQUENCES.

Unwilling to believe he had become an object of aversion to Amabel, Rochester renewed his solicitations on the following day, and calling into play his utmost fascination of manner, endeavoured to remove any ill impression produced by his previous violence. She was proof, however, against his arts; and though he never lost his mastery over himself, he had some difficulty in concealing his chagrin at the result of the interview. He now began to adopt a different course, and entering into long discussions with Amabel, strove by every effort of wit and ridicule to shake and subvert her moral and religious principles. But here again he failed, and once more shifting his ground, affected to be convinced by her arguments. He entirely altered his demeanour, and though Amabel could not put much faith in the change, it was a subject of real rejoicing to her. Though scarcely conscious of it herself, he insensibly won upon her regards, and

she passed many hours of each day in his society without finding it irksome. Seeing the advantage he had gained, and well aware that he should lose it by the slightest indiscretion, Rochester acted with the greatest caution. The more at ease she felt with him, the more deferential did he become; and before she was conscious of her danger the poor girl was once more on the brink of the precipice.

It was about this time that Leonard Holt, as has been previously intimated, discovered her retreat, and contrived by clambering up a pear-tree which was nailed against the wall of the house, to reach her chamber window. Having received her assurance that she had resisted all Rochester's importunities, the apprentice promised to return on the following night with means to effect her liberation, and departed. Fully persuaded that she could now repose confidence in the Earl, Amabel acquainted him, the next morning, with Leonard's visit, adding that he would now have an opportunity of proving the sincerity of his professions by delivering her up to her friends.

"Since you desire it," replied the Earl, who heard her with an unmoved countenance, though internally torn with passion, "I will convey you to your father myself. I had hoped," he added with a sigh, "that we should never part again."

"I fear I have been mistaken in you, my lord," rejoined Amabel, half repenting her frankness.

"Not so," he replied. "I will do anything you require, except deliver you to this hateful apprentice. If it is your pleasure, I repeat, I will take you back to your father."

"Promise me this, my lord, and I shall be quite easy," cried Amabel, joyfully.

"I do promise it," he returned. "But oh! why not stay with me, and complete the good work you have begun?"

Amabel averted her head, and Rochester, sighing deeply, quitted the room. An attendant shortly afterwards came to inform her that the Earl intended to start for London without delay, and begged her to prepare for the journey. In an hour's time, a carriage drove to the door, and Rochester having placed her and Prudence in it, mounted his horse, and set forth. Late on the second day, they arrived in London, and passing through the silent and deserted streets, the aspect of which struck terror into all the party, shaped their course towards the city. Presently, they reached Ludgate, but instead of proceeding to Wood Street, the carriage turned off on the right, and traversing Thames Street, crossed London Bridge. Amabel could obtain no explanation of this change from Prudence, and her uneasiness was not diminished when the vehicle, which was driven down a narrow street on the left immediately after quitting the bridge, stopped at the entrance of a large court-yard. Rochester, who

had already dismounted, assisted her to alight, and in answer to her hasty inquiries why he had brought her thither, told her he thought it better to defer taking her to her father till the morrow. Obliged to be content with this excuse, she was led into the house, severely reproaching herself for her indiscretion. Nothing, however, occurred to alarm her that night. The Earl was even more deferential than before, and assuring her he would fulfil his promise in the morning, confided her to Prudence.

The house whither she had been brought was large and old-fashioned. The rooms had once been magnificently fitted up, but the hangings and furniture were much faded, and had a gloomy and neglected air. This was especially observable in the sleeping-chamber appointed for her reception. It was large and lofty, panelled with black and shining oak, with a highly-polished floor of the same material, and was filled with cumbrous chests and cabinets, and antique high-backed chairs. But the most noticeable object was a large state-bed, with a heavy square canopy, covered with the richest damask woven with gold, and hung with curtains of the same stuff, though now decayed and tarnished. A chill crept over Amabel as she gazed around.

"I cannot help thinking," she observed to Prudence, "that I shall breathe my last in this room, and in that bed."

"I hope not, madam," returned the attendant, unable to repress a shudder.

Nothing more was said, and Amabel retired to rest. But not being able to sleep, and having vainly tried to compose herself, she arose and opened the window. It was a serene and beautiful night, and she could see the smooth river sparkling in the starlight and flowing at a hundred yards' distance at the foot of the garden. Beyond, she could indistinctly perceive the outline of the mighty city, while nearer on the left lay the bridge. Solemnly across the water came the sound of innumerable bells, tolling for those who had died of the plague, and were now being borne to their last home. While listening to these sad sounds, another, but more doleful and appalling noise, caught her ears. It was the rumbling of cart-wheels in the adjoining street, accompanied by the ringing of a hand-bell, while a hoarse voice cried, "Bring out your dead! bring out your dead!" On hearing this cry, she closed the window and retired. Morning broke before sleep visited her weary eyelids, and then, overcome by fatigue, she dropped into a slumber, from which she did not awake until day was far advanced. She found Prudence sitting by her bedside, and alarmed by the expression of her countenance, anxiously inquired what was the matter?

"Alas! madam," replied the attendant, "the Earl has been taken suddenly ill. He set out for

Wood Street the first thing this morning, and has seen your father, who refuses to receive you. On his return, he complained of a slight sickness, which has gradually increased in violence, and there can be little doubt it is the plague. Advice has been sent for. He prays you not to disturb yourself on his account, but to consider yourself sole mistress of this house, whatever may befall him."

Amabel passed a miserably anxious day. A fresh interest had been awakened in her heart in behalf of the Earl, and the precarious state in which she conceived him placed, did not tend to diminish it. She made many inquiries after him, and learned that he was worse, while the fearful nature of the attack could no longer be questioned. On the following day, Prudence reported that the distemper had made such rapid and terrible progress, that his recovery was considered almost hopeless.

"He raves continually of you, madam," said the attendant, "and I have no doubt he will expire with your name on his lips."

Amabel was moved to tears by the information, and withdrawing into a corner of the room, prayed fervently for the supposed sufferer. Prudence gazed at her earnestly and compassionately, and muttering something to herself, quitted the room. The next day was the critical one (so it was said) for the Earl, and Amabel awaited in tearful

anxiety the moment that was to decide his fate. It came, and he was pronounced out of danger. When the news was brought the anxious girl, she fainted.

A week passed, and the Earl continued to improve, and all danger of infection — if any such existed — being at an end, he sent a message to Amabel, beseeching her to grant him an interview in his own room. She willingly assented, and, following the attendant, found him stretched upon a couch. In spite of his paleness and apparent debility, however, his good looks were but little impaired, and his attire, though negligent, was studiously arranged for effect. On Amabel's appearance, he made an effort to rise, but she hastened to prevent him. After thanking her for her kind inquiries, he entered into a long conversation with her, in the course of which he displayed sentiments so exactly coinciding with her own that the good opinion she had already begun to entertain for him was soon heightened into the liveliest interest. They parted to meet again in the same way on the following day — and on the day following that. The bloom returned to the Earl's countenance, and he looked handsomer than ever. A week thus passed, and at the end of it, he said — "To-morrow I shall be well enough to venture forth again, and my first business shall be to proceed to your father, and see whether he is now able to receive you."

"The plague has not yet abated, my lord," she observed, blushingly.

"True," he replied, looking passionately at her. "Oh, forgive me, Amabel," he added, taking her hand, which she did not attempt to withdraw. "Forgive me, if I am wrong. But I now think your feelings are altered towards me, and that I may venture to hope you will be mine?"

Amabel's bosom heaved with emotion. She tried to speak, but could not. Her head declined upon his shoulder, and her tears flowed fast.

"I am answered," he cried, scarcely able to contain his rapture, and straining her to his bosom.

"I know not whether I am doing rightly," she murmured, gazing at him through her tears, "but I believe you mean me truly. God forgive you if you do not."

"Have no more doubts," cried the Earl. "You have wrought an entire change in me. Our union shall not be delayed an hour. It shall take place in Saint Saviour's to-night."

"Not to-night," cried Amabel, trembling at his eagerness — "to-morrow."

"To-night, to-night!" reiterated the Earl, victoriously. And he rushed out of the room.

Amabel was no sooner left to herself than she repented what she had done. "I fear I have made a false step," she mused; "but it is now too late to retreat, and I will hope for the best. He cannot mean to deceive me."

Her meditations were interrupted by the entrance of Prudence, who came towards her with a face full of glee.

"My lord has informed me of the good news," she said. "You are to be wedded to him to-day. I have expected it all along, but it is somewhat sudden at last. He is gone in search of the priest, and in the mean time has ordered me to attire you for the ceremony. I have several rich dresses for your ladyship—for so I must now call you—to choose from."

"The simplest will suit me best," replied Amabel; "and do not call me ladyship till I have a right to the title."

"That will be so soon that I am sure there can be no harm in using it now," returned Prudence. "But pray let me show you the dresses."

Amabel suffered herself to be led into another room, where she saw several sumptuous female habiliments, and selecting the least showy of them, was soon arrayed in it by the officious attendant.

More than two hours elapsed before Rochester returned, when he entered Amabel's chamber, accompanied by Sir George Etherege and Pillichody. A feeling of misgiving crossed Amabel as she beheld his companions.

"I have had some difficulty in finding a clergyman," said the Earl, "for the rector of Saint Saviour's has fled from the plague. His curate,

however, will officiate for him, and is now in the church."

Amabel fixed a searching look upon him.

"Why are these gentlemen here?" she asked.

"I have brought them with me," rejoined Rochester, "because, as they were aware of the injury I once intended you, I wish them to be present at its reparation."

"I am satisfied," she replied.

Taking her hand, the Earl then led her to a carriage which conveyed them to Saint Saviour's. Just as they alighted, the dead-cart passed, and several bodies were brought towards it. Eager to withdraw her attention from the spectacle, Rochester hurried her into the old and beautiful church. In another moment, they were joined by Etherege and Pillichody, and they proceeded to the altar, where the priest, a young man, was standing. The ceremony was then performed, and the Earl led his bride back to the carriage. On their return, they had to undergo another ill-omened interruption. The dead-cart was stationed near the gateway, and some delay occurred before it could be moved forward. Amabel, however, suffered no further misgiving to take possession of her. Deeming herself wedded to the Earl, she put no constraint on her affection for him, and her happiness, though shortlived, was deep and full.

A month passed away like a dream of delight.

Nothing occurred in the slightest degree to mar her felicity. Rochester seemed only to live for her — to think only of her. At the end of this time, some indifference began to manifest itself in his deportment to her, and he evinced a disposition to return to the court and to its pleasures.

"I thought you had for ever abandoned them, my dear lord," said Amabel, reproachfully.

"For awhile I have," he replied carelessly.

"You must leave me, if you return to them," she rejoined.

"If I must, I must," said the Earl.

"You cannot mean this, my lord," she cried, bursting into tears. "You cannot be so changed."

"I have never changed since you first knew me," replied Rochester.

"Impossible!" she cried, in a tone of anguish, "you have not the faults — the vices, you once had."

"I know not what you call faults and vices, madam," replied the Earl, sharply, "but I have the same qualities as heretofore."

"Am I to understand, then," cried Amabel, a fearful suspicion of the truth breaking upon her, "that you never sincerely repented your former actions?"

"You are to understand it," replied Rochester.

"And you deceived me when you affirmed the contrary?"

"I deceived you," he replied.

"I begin to suspect," she cried, with a look of horror and doubt, "that the attack of the plague was feigned."

"You are not far wide of the truth," was the reply.

"And our marriage?" she cried, "our marriage? Was that feigned likewise?"

"It was," replied Rochester calmly.

Amabel looked at him fixedly for a few minutes, as if she could not credit his assertion, and then receiving no contradiction, uttered a wild scream, and rushed out of the room. Rochester followed, and saw her dart with lightning swiftness across the court-yard. On gaining the street, he perceived her flying figure already at some distance, and greatly alarmed, started in pursuit. The unfortunate girl was not allowed to proceed far. Two persons who were approaching, and who proved to be Etherege and Pillichody, caught hold of her, and detained her till Rochester came up. When the latter attempted to touch her, she uttered such fearful shrieks, that Etherege entreated him to desist. With some difficulty, she was taken back to the house. But it was evident that the shock had unsettled her reason. She alternately uttered wild piercing screams, or broke into hysterical laughter. The Earl's presence so much increased her frenzy that he gladly withdrew.

"This is a melancholy business, my lord," ob-

served Etherege, as they quitted the room together, "and I am sorry for my share in it. We have both much to answer for."

"Do you think her life in danger?" rejoined Rochester.

"It would be well if it were so," returned the other; "but I fear she will live to be a perpetual memento to you of the crime you have committed."

Amabel's delirium produced a high fever, which continued for three days. Her screams were at times so dreadful, that her betrayer shut himself up in the farthest part of the house that he might not hear them. When at last she sank into a sleep like that of death, produced by powerful opiates, he stole into the room, and gazed at her with feelings, which those who watched his countenance, did not envy. It was hoped by the chirurgeon in attendance, that when the violence of the fever abated, Amabel's reason would be restored. But it was not so. Her faculties were completely shaken, and the cause of her affliction being effaced from her memory, she now spoke of the Earl of Rochester with her former affection.

Her betrayer once ventured into her presence, but he did not repeat the visit. Her looks and her tenderness were more than even *his* firmness could bear, and he hurried away to hide his emotion from the attendants. Several days passed on, and as no improvement took place, the Earl, who began to

find the stings of conscience too sharp for farther endurance, resolved to try to deaden the pangs by again plunging into the dissipation of court. Prudence had been seized by the plague, and removed to the pest-house, and not knowing to whom to entrust Amabel, it at last occurred to him that Judith Malmayns would be a fitting person, and he accordingly sent for her from Saint Paul's, and communicated his wishes to her, offering her a considerable reward for the service. Judith readily undertook the office, and the Earl delayed his departure for two days to see how all went on, and finding the arrangement, to all appearances, answer perfectly, he departed with Etherege and Pillichody.

Ever since the communication of the fatal truth had been made to her by the Earl, his unfortunate victim had occupied the large oak-panelled chamber, on entering which so sad a presentiment had seized her; and she had never quitted the bed where she thought she would breathe her last. On the night of Rochester's departure, she made many inquiries concerning him from Judith Malmayns, who was seated in an old broad-cushioned, velvet-covered chair beside her, and was told that the King required his attendance at Oxford, but that he would soon return. At this answer, the tears gathered thickly in Amabel's dark eyelashes, and she remained silent. By and by, she resumed the conversation.

"Do you know, nurse," she said, with a look of extreme anxiety, "I have forgotten my prayers. Repeat them to me, and I will say them after you."

"My memory is as bad as your ladyship's," replied Judith, contemptuously. "It is so long since I said mine, that I have quite forgotten them."

"That is wrong in you," returned Amabel, "very wrong. When I lived with my dear father we had prayers morning and evening, and I was never so happy as then. I feel it would do me good if I could pray as I used to do."

"Well, well, all in good time," replied Judith. "As soon as you are better, you shall go back to your father, and then you can do as you please."

"No, no, I cannot go back to him," returned Amabel. "I am the Earl of Rochester's wife — his wedded wife. Am I not Countess of Rochester?"

"To be sure you are," replied Judith. "To be sure."

"I sometimes think otherwise," rejoined Amabel, mournfully. "And so my dear lord is gone to Oxford?"

"He is," returned Judith, "but he will be back soon. And now," she added, with some impatience, "you have talked quite long enough. You must take your composing draught, and go to sleep."

With this, she arose, and stepping to the table which stood by the side of the bed, filled a wine-glass with the contents of a silver flagon, and gave it to her.

Amabel drank the mixture, and complaining of its nauseous taste, Judith handed her a plate of fruit from the table to remove it. Soon after this, she dropped asleep, when the nurse arose, and taking a light from the table, cautiously possessed herself of a bunch of keys which were placed in a small pocket over Amabel's head, and proceeded to unlock a large chest that stood near the foot of the bed. She found it filled with valuables; with chains of gold, necklaces of precious stones, loops of pearl, diamond crosses, and other ornaments. Besides these, there were shawls and stuffs of the richest description. While contemplating these treasures, and considering how she could carry them off without alarming the household, she was startled by a profound sigh, and looking towards the bed, perceived to her great alarm, that Amabel had opened her eyes, and was watching her.

"What are you doing there, nurse?" she cried.

"Only looking at these pretty things, your ladyship," replied Judith, in an embarrassed tone.

"I hope you are not going to steal them?" said Amabel.

"Steal them!" echoed Judith, alarmed.—"Oh, no! What should make your ladyship think so?"

Designed & Engraved by J. Franklin

Judith Malmaynus meditating the Murder of Amabel.

"I don't know," said Amabel; "but put them by, and bring the keys to me."

Judith feigned compliance, but long before she had restored the things to the chest, Amabel had again fallen asleep. Apprised by her tranquil breathing of this circumstance, Judith arose, and shading the candle with her hand, crept noiselessly towards the bed. Dark thoughts crossed her as she gazed at the unfortunate sleeper, and moving with the utmost caution, she set the light on the table behind the curtains, and had just grasped the pillow, with the intention of plucking it from under Amabel's head, and of smothering her with it, when she felt herself restrained by a powerful grasp, and turning in the utmost alarm, beheld the Earl of Rochester.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CERTIFICATE.

"WRETCH!" cried the Earl. "An instinctive dread that you would do your poor charge some injury brought me back, and I thank heaven I have arrived in time to prevent your atrocious purpose."

"Your lordship would have acted more discreetly in staying away," replied Judith, recovering her resolution; "and I would recommend you not to meddle in the matter, but to leave it to me. No suspicion shall alight on you, nor shall it even be known that her end was hastened. Leave the house as secretly as you came, and proceed on your journey with a light heart. She will never trouble you further."

"What!" exclaimed Rochester, who was struck dumb for the moment by surprise and indignation, "do you imagine I would listen to such a proposal? Do you think I would sanction her murder?"

"I am sure you would if you knew as much as I do," replied Judith, calmly. "Hear me, my lord," she continued, drawing him to a little dis-

tance from the bed, and speaking in a deep low tone. "You cannot marry Mistress Mallet while this girl lives."

Rochester looked sternly and inquiringly at her.

"You think your marriage was feigned," pursued Judith; "that he was no priest who performed the ceremony; and that no other witnesses were present except Sir George Etherege and Pillichody. But you are mistaken. I and Chowles were present; and he who officiated *was* a priest. The marriage was a lawful one, and yon sleeping girl, who, but for your ill-timed interference, would, ere this, have breathed her last, is to all intents and purposes Countess of Rochester."

"A lie!" cried the Earl, furiously.

"I will soon prove it to be the truth," rejoined Judith. "Your retainer, and unscrupulous agent, Major Pillichody, applied to Chowles to find some one to personate a clergyman in a mock marriage, which your lordship wished to have performed, and promised a handsome reward for the service. Chowles mentioned the subject to me, and we speedily contrived a plan to outwit your lordship, and turn the affair to our own advantage."

The Earl uttered an ejaculation of rage.

"Being acquainted with one of the minor canons of Saint Paul's, a worthy and pious young man, named Vincent," pursued Judith, utterly unmoved by Rochester's anger, "who resided hard by the cathedral, we hastened to him, and acquainted him

with the design, representing ourselves as anxious to serve the poor girl, and defeat your lordship's wicked design,—for such we termed it. With a little persuasion, Mr. Vincent consented to the scheme. Pillichody was easily duped by Chowles's statement, and the ceremony was fully performed."

"The whole story is a fabrication," cried the Earl, with affected incredulity.

"I have a certificate of the marriage," replied Judith, "signed by Mr. Vincent, and attested by Chowles and myself. If ever woman was wedded to man, Amabel is wedded to your lordship."

"If this is the case, why seek to destroy her?" demanded the Earl. "Her life must be of more consequence to you than her removal."

"I will deal frankly with you," replied Judith. "She discovered me in the act of emptying that chest, and an irresistible impulse prompted me to make away with her. But your lordship is in the right. Her life *is* valuable to me, and she *shall* live. But I repeat you cannot marry the rich heiress, Mistress Mallet."

"Temptress!" cried the Earl. "You put frightful thoughts into my head?"

"Go your ways," replied Judith, "and think no more about her. All shall be done that you require. I claim as my reward the contents of that chest."

"Your reward should be the gallows," rejoined the Earl, indignantly. "I reject your proposal

at once. Begone, wretch! or I shall forget you are a woman, and sacrifice you to my fury. Begone!"

"As your lordship pleases," she replied; "but first, the Countess of Rochester shall be made acquainted with her rights." So saying, she broke from him, and rushed to the bed.

"What are you about to do?" he cried.

"Waken her," rejoined Judith, slightly shaking the sleeper.

"Ah!" exclaimed Amabel, opening her eyes, and gazing at her with a terrified and bewildered look.

"His lordship is returned," said Judith.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Amabel, raising herself in the bed. "Where is he? — Ah, I see him.— Come to me, my dear lord," she added, stretching out her arms to him, "come to me."

But evil thoughts kept Rochester motionless.

"Oh! come to me, my lord," cried Amabel, in a troubled tone, "or I shall begin to think what I have dreamed is true, and that I am not wedded to you."

"It *was* merely a dream, your ladyship," observed Judith. "I will bear witness you are wedded to his lordship, for I was present at the ceremony."

"I did not see you," remarked Amabel.

"I was there nevertheless," replied Judith.

"I am sorry to hear it," rejoined Amabel.

"Your ladyship would rejoice if you knew all," returned Judith, significantly.

"Why so?" inquired the other, curiously.

"Because the clergyman who married you is dead of the plague," was the answer; "and it may chance in these terrible times that the two gentlemen who were present at the ceremony may die of the same distemper, and then there will be no one left but me and another person to prove that your marriage was lawful."

"But its lawfulness will never be questioned, my dear lord, will it?" asked Amabel, looking beseechingly at Rochester.

"Never," replied Judith, producing a small piece of parchment, "while I hold this certificate."

"Give me that document," said the Earl, in an undertone to her.

Judith directed her eyes towards the chest.

"It is yours," said the Earl, in the same tone as before.

"What are you whispering, my lord?" inquired Amabel, uneasily.

"I am merely telling her to remove that chest, sweetheart," he replied.

"Do not send it away," cried Amabel. "It contains all the ornaments and trinkets you have given me. Do you know," she added in a whisper, "I caught her looking into it just now, and I suspect she was about to steal something."

"Pshaw!" cried the Earl—"she acted by my directions. Take the chest away," he added to Judith.

"Has your lordship no further orders?" she rejoined significantly.

"None whatever," he replied with a frown.

"Before you go, give me the certificate," cried Amabel. "I must have it."

Judith pretended not to hear her.

"Give it her," whispered the Earl, "I will remove it when she falls asleep."

Nodding acquiescence, Judith took the parchment from her bosom, and returned it to the bed. While this was passing, the Earl walked towards the chest, and cast his eye over such of its contents as were scattered upon the floor. Judith watched him carefully, and when his back was turned, drew a small lancet, and affecting to arrange her dress, slightly punctured Amabel's neck. The pain was trifling, but the poor girl uttered a cry.

"What is the matter?" cried the Earl, turning suddenly round.

"Nothing—nothing," replied Judith, "a pin in my sleeve pricked her as I was fastening her cap, that was all. Her death is certain," she added to herself, "she is inoculated with the plague-venom."

She then went to the chest, and replacing everything within it, removed it by the help of the Earl of Rochester into the adjoining room.

"I will send for it at midnight," she said.

"It shall be delivered to your messenger," rejoined the Earl; "but you will answer for Chowles's secrecy?"

"I will," returned Judith, with a meaning smile. "But you may take my word for it you will not be troubled long with your wife. If I have any judgment respecting the plague, she is already infected."

"Indeed!" cried Rochester,—"then—" but he checked himself, and added, "I do not believe it. Begone."

"He *does* believe it for all that," muttered Judith, as she slunk away.

Rochester returned to Amabel, and sat by her until she fell asleep, when he took the parchment from beneath the pillow where she had placed it. Examining it, he found it, as Judith had stated, a certificate of his marriage, signed by Mark Vincent, the clergyman who had officiated, and duly attested. Having carefully perused it, he held it towards the taper, with the intention of destroying it.

As he was about to perpetrate this unworthy action, he looked towards the bed. The soft sweet smile that played upon the sleeper's features turned him from his purpose. Placing the parchment in his doublet, he left the room, and summoning a female attendant, alleged some reason for his unexpected return, and ordered her to watch by the

bedside of her mistress. Giving some further directions, he threw himself upon a couch and sought a few hours' repose.

At daybreak, he repaired to Amabel's chamber, and finding her wrapped in a peaceful slumber, he commended her to the attendant, and departed.

On awaking, Amabel complained of an uneasy sensation on her neck, and the attendant examining the spot, found to her great alarm a small red pustule. Without making a single observation, she left the room, and despatched a messenger after the Earl of Rochester to acquaint him that the Countess was attacked by the plague. Such was the terror inspired by this dread disorder that the moment it was known that Amabel was attacked by it, the whole household, except an old woman, fled. This old woman, whose name was Batley, and who acted as the Earl's housekeeper, took upon herself the office of nurse. Before evening, the poor sufferer, who had endured great agony during the whole of the day, became so much worse, that Mrs. Batley ran out in search of assistance. She met with a watchman who told her that a famous apothecary, from Clerkenwell, named Sibbald, who was celebrated for the cures he had effected, had just entered a neighbouring house, and offered to await his coming forth, and send him to her. Thanking him, Mrs. Batley returned to the house, and presently afterwards, Sibbald made his appearance.

His looks and person had become even more repulsive than formerly. He desired to be led to the patient, and on seeing her shook his head. He examined the pustule, which had greatly increased in size, and turning away, muttered, "I can do nothing for her."

"At least make the attempt," implored Mrs. Batley. "She is the Countess of Rochester. You shall be well rewarded — and if you cure her, the Earl will make your fortune."

"If his lordship would change stations with me, I could not cure her," replied Sibbald. "Let me look at her again," he added, examining the pustule. "There is a strange appearance about this tumour. Has Judith Malmayns attended her?"

"She was here yesterday," replied Mrs. Batley.

"I thought so," he muttered. "I repeat it is all over with her."

And he turned to depart.

"Do not leave her thus, in pity do not," cried the old woman detaining him. "Make some effort to save her. My lord loves her to distraction, and will abundantly reward you."

"All I can do is to give her something to allay the pain," returned Sibbald.

And drawing a small phial from his doublet, he poured its contents into a glass, and administered it to the patient.

" That will throw her into a slumber," he said, " and when she wakes, she will be without pain. But her end will not be far off."

Mrs. Batley took a purse from a drawer in one of the cabinets, and gave it to the apothecary, who bowed, and retired. As he had foretold, Amabel fell into a heavy lethargy, which continued during the whole of the night. Mrs. Batley, who had never left her, noticed that an extraordinary and fearful change had taken place in her countenance, and she could not doubt that the apothecary's prediction would be realized. The tumour had increased in size, and was surrounded by a dusky brown circle, which she knew to be a bad sign. The sufferer's eyes, when she opened them, and gazed around, had a dim and glazed look. But she was perfectly calm and composed, and as had been prognosticated, free from pain. She had, also, fully regained her faculties, and seemed quite aware of her dangerous situation.

But the return of reason brought with it no solace. On the contrary, the Earl's treachery rushed upon her recollection, and gave her infinitely more anguish than the bodily pain she had recently endured. She bedewed the pillow with her tears, and fervently prayed for forgiveness for her involuntary fault. Mrs. Batley was deeply moved by her affliction, and offered her every consolation in her power.

" I would the plague had selected me for a vic-

tim instead of your ladyship," she said. "It is hard to leave the world at your age, possessed of beauty, honours and wealth. At mine, it would not signify."

"You mistake the cause of my grief," returned Amabel; "I do not lament that my hour is at hand, but—" and her emotion so overpowered her that she could not proceed.

"Do not disturb yourself further, dear lady," rejoined the old woman. "Let the worst happen, I am sure you are well prepared to meet your Maker."

"I once was," replied Amabel in a voice of despair, "but now — Oh, Heaven forgive me!"

"Shall I fetch some holy minister to pray beside you, my lady?" said Mrs. Batley; "one to whom you can pour forth the sorrows of your heart?"

"Do so! oh, do!" cried Amabel, "and do not call me lady. I am not worthy to be placed in the same rank as yourself."

"Her wits are clean gone," muttered Mrs. Batley, looking at her compassionately.

"Heed me not," cried Amabel; "but if you have any pity for the unfortunate, do as you have promised."

"I will,—I will," said Mrs. Batley, departing.

Half an hour, which scarcely seemed a moment to the poor sufferer, who was employed in fervent prayer, elapsed before Mrs. Batley returned. She

was accompanied by a tall man, whom Amabel recognized as Solomon Eagle.

"I have not been able to find a clergyman," said the old woman, "but I have brought a devout man who is willing to pray with you."

"Ah!" exclaimed the enthusiast, starting as he beheld Amabel. "Can it be Mr. Bloundel's daughter?"

"It is," returned Amabel, with a groan. "Leave us, my good woman," she added to Mrs. Batley, "I have something to impart to Solomon Eagle which is for his ear alone."

The old woman instantly retired, and Amabel briefly related her hapless story to the enthusiast.

"May I hope for forgiveness?" she inquired, as she concluded.

"Assuredly," replied Solomon Eagle, "assuredly! You have not erred wilfully, but through ignorance, and therefore have committed no offence. *You* will be forgiven — but woe to your deceiver, here and hereafter."

"Oh! say not so," she cried. "May Heaven pardon him, as I do. While I have strength left, I will pray for him."

And she poured forth her supplications for the Earl in terms so earnest and pathetic, that the tears flowed down Solomon Eagle's rough cheek. At this juncture, hasty steps were heard in the adjoining passage, and the door opening, admitted

the Earl of Rochester, who rushed towards the bed.

"Back!" cried Solomon Eagle, pushing him forcibly aside. "Back!"

"What do you here?" cried Rochester, fiercely.

"I am watching over the death-bed of your victim," returned Solomon Eagle. "Retire, my lord. You disturb her."

"Oh, no," returned Amabel, meekly. "Let him come near me." And as Solomon Eagle drew a little aside, and allowed the Earl to approach, she added, "With my latest breath I forgive you, my lord, for the wrong you have done me, and bless you."

The Earl tried to speak, but his voice was suffocated by emotion. As soon as he could find words, he said, "Your goodness completely overpowers me, dearest Amabel. Heaven is my witness, that even now I would make you all the reparation in my power, were it needful. But it is not so. The wrong I intended you was never committed. I myself was deceived. I intended a feigned marriage, but it was rightfully performed. Time will not allow me to enter into further particulars of the unhappy transaction, but you may credit my assertion, when I tell you you are indeed my wife, and Countess of Rochester."

"If I thought so, I should die happy," replied Amabel.

"Behold this proof!" said Rochester, producing the certificate.

"I cannot read it," replied Amabel. "But you could not have the heart to deceive me now."

"I will read it, and you well know *I* would not deceive you," cried Solomon Eagle, casting his eye over it, — "His lordship has avouched the truth," he continued. "It is a certificate of your marriage with him, duly signed and attested."

"God be thanked!" ejaculated Amabel, fervently. "God be thanked! You have been spared that guilt, and I shall die content."

"I trust your life will long be spared," rejoined the Earl.

Amabel shook her head.

"There is but one man in this city who could save her," whispered Solomon Eagle, "and I doubt even his power to do so."

"Who do you mean?" cried Rochester, eagerly.

"Doctor Hodges," replied the enthusiast.

"I know him well," cried the Earl. "I will fly to him instantly. Remain with her till I return."

"My lord — my dear lord," interposed Amabel, faintly, "you trouble yourself needlessly. I am past all human aid."

"Do not despair," replied the Earl. "Many years of happiness are, I trust, in store for us. Do not detain me. I go to save you. Farewell for a short time."

"Farewell, for ever, my lord," she said, gently pressing his hand. "We shall not meet again.

Your name will be coupled with my latest breath."

"I shall be completely unmanned if I stay here a moment longer," cried the Earl, breaking from her, and rushing out of the room.

As soon as he was gone, Amabel addressed herself once more to prayer with Solomon Eagle, and in this way an hour passed by. The Earl not returning at the end of that time, Solomon Eagle became extremely uneasy, every moment being of the utmost consequence, and summoning Mrs. Batley, committed the patient to her care, and set off in search of Hodges. He hastened to the Doctor's house — he was absent — to Saint Paul's — he was not there, but he learnt that a person answering to the Earl's description had been making similar inquiries after him. At last, one of the chirurgeon's assistants told him that he thought the Doctor was gone towards Cornhill, and hoping accidentally to meet with him, the enthusiast set off in that direction. While passing near the Exchange, he encountered Leonard, as before related, but did not think fit to acquaint him with more than Amabel's dangerous situation; and he had reason to regret making the communication at all, on finding its effect upon the poor youth. There was, however, no help for it, and placing him in what appeared a situation of safety, he left him.

Rochester, meanwhile, had been equally un-

successful in his search for Hodges. Hurrying first in one direction and then in another, at the suggestion of the chirurgeon's assistant, he at last repaired to the Doctor's residence, determined to await his return. In half an hour he came, and received the Earl, as the old porter stated to Thirlby and Leonard, with angry astonishment. As soon as they were alone, the Earl told him all that had occurred, and besought him to accompany him to the poor sufferer.

"I will go to her," said Hodges, who had listened to the recital with mixed feelings of sorrow and indignation, "on one condition — and one only — namely, that your lordship does not see her again without my permission."

"Why do you impose this restriction upon me, sir?" demanded Rochester.

"I do not think it necessary to give my reasons, my lord," returned Hodges; "but I will only go upon such terms."

"Then I must perforce submit," replied the Earl; "but I entreat you to set forth without a moment's delay, or you will be too late."

"I will follow you instantly," rejoined Hodges. "Your lordship can wait for me at the Southwark side of the bridge." He then opened the door, reiterating the terms upon which alone he would attend, and the Earl departed.

Shortly afterwards he set out, and making the best of his way, found Rochester at the appointed

place. The latter conducted him to the entrance of the habitation, and indicating a spot where he would remain till his return, left him.

Hodges soon found his way to the chamber of the sufferer, and at once perceived that all human aid was vain. She exhibited much pleasure at seeing him, and looked round, as if in search of the Earl. Guessing her meaning, the physician, who now began to regret the interdiction he had placed upon him, told her that he was the cause of his absence.

"It is well," she murmured,—"well."

She then made some inquiries after her relatives, and receiving a satisfactory answer, said, "I am glad you are come. You will be able to tell my father how I died."

"It will be a great comfort to him to learn the tranquil frame in which I have found you," replied Hodges.

"How long have I to live?" asked Amabel, somewhat quickly. "Do not deceive me."

"You had better make your preparations without delay," returned Hodges.

"I understand," she replied. And joining her hands upon her breast, she began to murmur a prayer.

Hodges, who up to this moment had had some difficulty in repressing his emotion, withdrew to a short distance to hide his fast-falling tears. He was roused shortly after, by a sudden and startling cry from the old woman.

"Oh, sir, she is going! she is going!" ejaculated Mrs. Batley.

He found the exclamation true. The eyes of the dying girl were closed. There was a slight quiver of the lips, as if she murmured some name —probably Rochester's,— and then all was over.

Hodges gazed at her sorrowfully for some time. He then roused himself, and giving some necessary directions to the old woman respecting the body, quitted the house. Not finding the Earl at the place he had appointed to meet him, after waiting for a short time, he proceeded towards his own house. On the way, he was met by Thirlby and Parravicin, as previously related, and conducted to the house in Nicholas Lane. It will not be necessary to recapitulate what subsequently occurred. We shall, therefore, proceed to the point of time when he quitted his new patient, and entered the room where Thirlby and Leonard were waiting for him. Both, as has been stated, rushed towards him, and the former eagerly asked his opinion respecting his daughter.

"My opinion is positive," replied Hodges. "With care, she will undoubtedly recover."

"Heaven be thanked!" cried Thirlby, dropping on his knees.

"And now, one word to me, sir," cried Leonard. "What of Amabel?"

"Alas!" exclaimed the Doctor, "her troubles are ended."

"Dead!" shrieked Leonard.

"Ay, dead!" repeated the Doctor. "She died of the plague to-night."

He then proceeded to detail briefly all that had occurred. Leonard listened like one stupefied, till he brought his recital to a close, and then asking where the house in which she had died was situated, rushed out of the room, and made his way, he knew not how, into the street. His brain seemed on fire, and he ran so quickly, that his feet appeared scarcely to touch the ground. A few seconds brought him to London Bridge. He crossed it, and turning down the street on the left, had nearly reached the house to which he had been directed, when his career was suddenly checked. The gate of the court-yard was opened, and two men, evidently from their apparel buriers of the dead, issued from it. They carried a long narrow board between them, with a body wrapped in a white sheet placed upon it. A freezing horror rooted Leonard to the spot where he stood. He could neither move nor utter a cry.

The men proceeded with their burthen towards the adjoining habitation, which was marked with the fatal red cross and inscription. Before it stood the dead-cart, partly filled with corpses. The foremost burier carried a lantern, but he held it so low that its light did not fall upon his burthen. Leonard, however, did not require to see the body to know whose it was. The moon was at the full,

Designed & Engraved by J. Franklin.

The Body of Annabel carried to the Dead Cart.

and shed a ghastly light over the group, and a large bat wheeled in narrow circles round the dead-cart.

On reaching the door of the house, the burier set down the lantern near the body of a young man which had just been thrust forth. At the same moment, Chowles, with a lantern in his hand, stepped out upon the threshold.

"Who have you got, Jonas?" he asked.

"I know not," replied the hindmost burier. "We entered yon large house, the door of which stood open, and in one of the rooms found an old woman in a fainting state, and the body of this young girl, wrapped in a sheet, and ready for the cart. So we clapped it on the board, and brought it away with us."

"You did right," replied Chowles. "I wonder whose body it is."

As he spoke, he held up his lantern, and unfastening it, threw the light full upon the face. The features were pale as marble; calm in their expression, and like those of one wrapped in placid slumber. The long fair hair hung over the side of the board. It was a sad and touching sight.

"Why, as I am a living man, it is the grocer's daughter, Amabel, — somewhile Countess of Rochester!" exclaimed Chowles.

"It is, it is!" cried the Earl, suddenly rushing from behind a building where he had hitherto

remained concealed. "Whither are you about to take her? Set her down—set her down."

"Hinder them not, my lord," vociferated another person, also appearing on the scene with equal suddenness. "Place her in the cart," cried Solomon Eagle — for he it was — to the bearers. "This is a just punishment upon you, my lord," he added to Rochester, as his injunctions were obeyed — "oppose them not in their duty."

It was not in the Earl's power to do so. Like Leonard, he was transfixed with horror. The other bodies were soon placed in the cart, and it was put in motion.

At this juncture, the apprentice's suspended faculties were for an instant — and an instant only — restored to him. He uttered a piercing cry, and staggering forward, fell senseless on the ground.

END OF THE FOURTH BOOK.

Book the Fifth.

DECEMBER 1665.

CHAPTER I.

THE DECLINE OF THE PLAGUE.

More than two months must be passed over in silence. During that time, the pestilence had so greatly abated as no longer to occasion alarm to those who had escaped its ravages. It has been mentioned that the distemper arrived at its height about the 10th of September, and though for the two following weeks the decline was scarcely perceptible, yet it had already commenced. On the last week in that fatal month, when all hope had been abandoned, the Bills of Mortality suddenly decreased in number one thousand eight hundred and thirty-four. And this fortunate change could not be attributed to the want of materials to act upon, for the sick continued as numerous as before, while the deaths were less frequent. In the next week, there was a further decrease of six hundred; in the next after that of six hundred; and so on till the end of October, when the cold weather setting in, the amount was reduced to nearly one thousand.

At first, when the distemper began to lose somewhat of its malignancy, a few scared individuals appeared in the streets, but carefully shunned each other. In a few days, however, considerable numbers joined them, and for the first time for nearly three months, there was something like life abroad. It is astonishing how soon hope and confidence are revived. Now that it could no longer be doubted that the plague was on the decline, it seemed as if a miracle had been performed in favour of the city. Houses were opened — shopkeepers resumed their business — and it was a marvel to every one that so many persons were left alive. Dejection and despair of the darkest kind were succeeded by frenzied delight, and no bound was put to the public satisfaction. Strangers stopped each other in the streets, and conversed together like old friends. The bells that had grown hoarse with tolling funerals, were now cracked with joyous peals. The general joy extended even to the sick, and many, buoyed up by hope, recovered, when in the former season of despondency, they would inevitably have perished. All fear of the plague seemed to vanish with the flying disorder. Those who were scarcely out of danger joined in the throng, and it was no uncommon sight to see men with bandages round their necks, or supported by staves and crutches, shaking hands with their friends, and even embracing them.

The consequence of this incautious conduct may be easily foreseen. The plague had received too severe a check, to burst forth anew, but it spread further than it otherwise would have done, and attacked many persons, who, but for their own imprudence, would have escaped. Amongst others, a barber in Saint-Martin's-le-Grand, who had fled into the country in August, returned to his shop in the middle of October, and catching the disorder from one of his customers, perished with the whole of his family.

But these, and several other equally-fatal instances, produced no effect on the multitude. Fully persuaded that the virulence of the disorder was exhausted, as indeed appeared to be the case, they gave free scope to their satisfaction, which was greater than was ever experienced by the inhabitants of a besieged city, reduced by famine to the last strait of despair, and suddenly restored to freedom and plenty. The more pious part of the community thronged to the churches, from which they had been so long absent, and returned thanks for their unexpected deliverance. Others, who had been terrified into seriousness and devotion, speedily forgot their former terrors, and resumed their old habits. Profaneness and debauchery again prevailed, and the taverns were as well filled as the churches. Solomon Eagle continued his midnight courses through the streets, but he could no longer find an audience as before.

Those who listened to him only laughed at his denunciations of a new judgment, and told him his preachings and prophecyings were now completely out of date.

By this time, numbers of those who had quitted London having returned to it, the streets began to resume their wonted appearance. The utmost care was taken by the authorities to cleanse and purify the houses, in order to remove all chance of keeping alive the infection. Every room in every habitation where a person had died of the plague — and there were few that had escaped the visitation,—were ordered to be white-washed, and the strongest fumigations were employed to remove the pestilential effluvia. Brimstone, resin, and pitch were burnt in the houses of the poor: benjamin, myrrh, and other more expensive perfumes in those of the rich; while vast quantities of powder were consumed in creating blasts to carry off the foul air. Large and constant fires were kept in all the houses, and several were burnt down in consequence of the negligence of their owners.

All goods, clothes, and bedding capable of harbouring infection, were condemned to be publicly burned, and vast bonfires were lighted in Finsbury Fields and elsewhere, into which many hundred cart-loads of such articles were thrown. The whole of Chowles's hoard, except the plate, which he managed, with Judith's aid, to carry off and

conceal in certain hiding-places in the vaults of Saint Faith's, were taken from the house in Nicholas Lane and cast into the fire.

The cathedral was one of the first places ordered to be purified. The pallets of the sick were removed and burned, and all the stains and impurities with which its floor and columns were polluted were cleansed. Nothing was left untried to free it from infection. It was washed throughout with vinegar, fumigated with the strongest scents, and several large barrels of pitch were set fire to in the aisles.

"It shall undergo another species of purification," said Solomon Eagle, who was present during these proceedings; "one that shall search every nook within it — shall embrace all those columns, and pierce every crack and crevice in those sculptured ornaments, — and then, and not till then, will it be thoroughly cleansed."

During all this time, the grocer had not opened his dwelling. The wisdom of his plan was now made fully apparent. The plague was declining fast, and not an inmate of his house had been attacked by it. Soon after the melancholy occurrence, he had been informed by Doctor Hodges of Amabel's death, but the humane physician concealed from him the painful circumstances under which it occurred. It required all Mr. Bloundel's fortitude to support him under the shock of this intelligence, and he did not communicate the

afflicting tidings to his wife, until he had prepared her for their reception. But she bore them better than he had anticipated, and though she mourned her daughter deeply and truly, she appeared completely resigned to the loss. Sorrow pervaded the whole household for some weeks, and the grocer, who never relaxed his system, shrouded his sufferings under the appearance of additional austerity of manner. It would have been a great consolation to him to see Leonard Holt, but the apprentice had disappeared, and even Doctor Hodges could give no account of him.

One night, in the middle of November, Mr. Bloundel signified to his wife his intention of going forth early on the following morning to satisfy himself that the plague was really abating. Accordingly, after he had finished his devotions and broken his fast, he put his design into execution. His first act on locking the door behind him, which he did as a measure of precaution, was to fall on his knees, and offer up prayers to heaven for his signal preservation. He then arose, and stepping into the middle of the street, gazed at the habitation which had formed his prison and refuge for nearly six months. There it was, with its shutters closed and barred—a secure asylum, with all alive within it, while every other dwelling in the street was desolate.

The grocer's sensations were novel and extraordinary. His first impulse was to enjoy his newly-

recovered freedom, and to put himself into active motion. But he checked the feeling as sinful, and proceeded along the street at a slow pace. He did not meet a single person until he reached Cheapside, where he found matters completely changed. Several shops were already opened, and there were a few carts and other vehicles tracking their way through the broad and yet grass-grown street. It was a clear frosty morning, and there was a healthful feel in the bracing atmosphere that produced an exhilarating effect on the spirits. The grocer pursued his course through the middle of the street, carefully avoiding all contact with such persons as he encountered, though he cordially returned their greetings, and wandered on, scarcely knowing whither he was going, but deeply interested in all he beheld.

The aspect of the city was indeed most curious. The houses were for the most part unoccupied — the streets overgrown with grass — while every object, animate and inanimate, bore some marks of the recent visitation. Still, all looked hopeful, and the grocer could not doubt that the worst was past. The different demeanour of the various individuals he met struck him. Now he passed a young man whistling cheerily, who saluted him, and said — "I have lost my sweetheart by the plague, but I shall soon get another." The next was a grave man, who muttered, "I have lost all," and walked pensively on. Then came others

in different moods, but all concurred in thinking that the plague was at an end; and the grocer derived additional confirmation of the fact from meeting numerous carts and other vehicles bringing families back to their houses from the country.

After roaming about for several hours, and pondering on all he saw, he found himself before the great western entrance of Saint Paul's. It chanced to be the morning on which the pallets and bedding were brought forth, and he watched the proceeding at a distance. All had been removed, and he was about to depart, when he perceived a person seated on a block of stone, not far from him, whom he instantly recognized.

"Leonard," he cried, "Leonard Holt, is it you?"

Thus addressed, and in these familiar tones, the apprentice looked up, and Mr. Bloundel started at the change that had taken place in him. Profound grief was written in every line of his thin and haggard countenance; his eyes were hollow, and had the most melancholy expression imaginable; and his flesh was wasted away from the bone. He looked the very image of hopeless affliction.

"I am sorry to find you in this state, Leonard," said the grocer, in a tone of deep commiseration; "but I am well aware of the cause. I myself have suffered severely but I deem it my duty to control my affliction."

"I *would* control it, if it were possible, Mr. Bloundel," replied Leonard. "But hope is dead in my breast. I shall never be happy again."

"I trust otherwise," replied the grocer, kindly. "Your trials have been very great, and so were those of the poor creature we both of us deplore. But she is at peace, and therefore we need not lament her."

"Alas!" exclaimed Leonard, mournfully, "I am now only anxious to rejoin her."

"It is selfish, if not sinful to grieve in this way," rejoined Mr. Bloundel, somewhat sternly. "You must bear your sorrow like a man. Come home with me. I will be a father to you. Nay, do not hesitate. I will have no refusal."

So saying, he took Leonard's arm, and led him in the direction of Wood Street. Nothing passed between them on the way, nor did Leonard evince any further emotion until he entered the door of the grocer's dwelling, when he uttered a deep groan. Mrs. Bloundel was greatly affected at seeing him, as were the rest of the family, and abundance of tears were shed by all, except Mr. Bloundel, who maintained his customary stoical demeanour throughout the meeting.

Satisfied that the pestilence had not declined sufficiently to warrant him in opening his house, the grocer determined to await the result of a few weeks. Indeed, that very night, he had reason to think he had defeated his plans by precipitancy.

While sitting after prayers with his family, he was seized with a sudden shivering and sickness, which he could not doubt were the precursors of the plague. He was greatly alarmed, but did not lose his command over himself.

"I have been most imprudent," he said, "in thus exposing myself to infection. I have symptoms of the plague about me, and will instantly repair to one of the upper rooms which I have laid aside as a hospital, in case of an emergency like the present. None of you must attend me. Leonard will fetch Doctor Hodges and a nurse. I shall then do very well. Farewell, dear wife and children! God bless you all, and watch over you. Remember me in your prayers!"

So saying, he arose and walked towards the door. His wife and elder son would have assisted him, but he motioned them away.

"Let me go with you, sir?" cried Leonard, who had arisen with the others. "I will nurse you. My life is of little consequence; and I cannot be more satisfactorily employed."

The grocer reluctantly assented, and the apprentice assisted him up stairs, and helped to place him in bed. No plague-token could be found about his person, but as the same alarming symptoms still continued, Leonard administered such remedies as he thought needful, and then went in search of Doctor Hodges.

On reaching Watling Street, he found Doctor

Hodges about to retire to rest. The worthy physician was greatly distressed by the apprentice's account of his master's illness; but was somewhat reassured when the symptoms were more minutely described to him.

While preparing certain medicines, and arming himself with his surgical implements, he questioned Leonard as to the cause of his long disappearance.

"Having seen nothing of you," he said, "since the fatal night when our poor Amabel's sorrows were ended, I began to feel very apprehensive on your account. Where have you been?"

"You shall hear," replied Leonard, "though the relation will be like opening my wounds afresh. On recovering from the terrible shock I had received, I found myself stretched upon a bed in a house whither I had been conveyed by Rainbird the watchman, who had discovered me lying in a state of insensibility in the street. For nearly a week I continued delirious, and should probably have lost my senses altogether but for the attentions of the watchman. As soon as I was able to move, I wandered to the lesser plague-pit, in Finsbury Fields, you will guess with what intent. My heart seemed breaking, and I thought I should pour forth my very soul in grief, as I gazed into that dreadful gulph, and thought she was there interred. Still my tears were a relief. Every evening for a month, I went to that sad spot, and re-

mained there till daybreak admonished me to return to Rainbird's dwelling. At last, he was seized by the distemper; but though I nursed him, voluntarily exposing myself to infection, and praying to be carried off, I remained untouched. Poor Rainbird died; and having seen his body thrown into the pit, I set off into Berkshire, and after three days toilsome travel on foot, reached Ashdown Park. It was a melancholy pleasure to behold the abode where she I had loved passed her last few days of happiness, and where I had been near her. Her aunt, good Mrs. Buscot, though overwhelmed by affliction at the sad tidings I brought her, received me with the utmost kindness, and tried to console me. My sorrow, however, was too deeply seated to be removed. Wandering over the downs, I visited Mrs. Compton at Kingston Lisle, from whose house Amabel was carried off by the perfidious Earl. She, also, received me with kindness, and strove, like Mrs. Buscot, to comfort me, and, like her, ineffectually. Finding my strength declining, and persuaded that my days were drawing to a close, I retraced my steps to London, hoping to find a final resting-place near her I had loved."

"You are, indeed, faithful to the grave, Leonard," said the physician, brushing away a tear; "and I never heard or read of affection stronger than yours. Sorrow is a great purifier, and you will come out all the better for your trial. You

are yet young, and though you never can love as you *have* loved a second time, your heart is not utterly seared."

"Utterly, sir," echoed Leonard, "utterly."

"You think so now," rejoined the physician. "But you will find it otherwise hereafter. I can tell you of one person who has suffered almost as much from your absence as you have done for the loss of Amabel. The Lady Isabella Argentine has made constant inquiries after you; and though I should be the last person to try to rouse you from your present state of despondency, by awakening hopes of an alliance with the sister of a proud noble, yet it may afford you consolation to know that she still cherishes the warmest regard for you."

"I am grateful to her," replied Leonard, sadly, but without exhibiting any other emotion. "She was dear to Amabel, and therefore will be ever dear to me. I would fain know," he added, his brow suddenly contracting, and his lip quivering, "what has become of the Earl of Rochester?"

"He has married a wealthy heiress, the fair Mistress Mallet," replied Hodges.

"Married, and so soon!" cried Leonard. "And he has quite forgotten his victim."

"Apparently so," replied the Doctor, with an expression of disgust.

"And it was for one who so lightly regarded her that she sacrificed herself," groaned Leonard, his head dropping upon his breast.

"Come," cried Hodges, taking his arm, and leading him out of the room. "We must go and look after your master."

With this, they made the best of their way to Wood Street. Arrived at the grocer's house they went up stairs, and Hodges immediately pronounced Mr. Bloundel to be suffering from a slight feverish attack, which a sudorific powder would remove. Having administered the remedy, he descended to the lower room to allay the fears of the family. Mrs. Bloundel received the happy tidings with tears of joy, and the Doctor remained a short time to condole with her on the loss she had sustained. The good dame wept bitterly on hearing the whole particulars, with which she had been hitherto unacquainted, attending her daughter's untimely death, but she soon regained her composure. They then spoke of Leonard, who had remained above with his master,—of his blighted hopes, and seemingly-incurable affliction.

"His is true love, indeed, Doctor," sighed Mrs. Bloundel. "Pity it is that it could not be requited."

"I know not how it is," rejoined Hodges, "and will not question the decrees of our All-Wise Ruler, but the strongest affection seldom, if ever, meets a return. Leonard himself was insensible to the devotion of one, of whom I may say without disparagement to our poor Amabel, that she was in my opinion her superior in beauty."

"And does this person love him still?" inquired Mrs. Bloundel, eagerly. "I ask, because I regard him as a son, and earnestly desire to restore him to happiness."

"Alas!" exclaimed Hodges, "there are obstacles in the way that cannot be removed. We must endeavour to cure him of his grief in some other way."

The conversation then dropped, and Hodges took his leave, promising to return on the morrow, and assuring Mrs. Bloundel that she need be under no further apprehension about her husband.

And so it proved. The powders removed all the grocer's feverish symptoms, and when Doctor Hodges made his appearance the next day, he found him dressed, and ready to go down stairs. Having received the physician's congratulations on his entire recovery, Mr. Bloundel inquired from him when he thought he might with entire safety open his shop. Hodges considered for a moment, and then replied, "I do not see any great risk in doing so now, but I would advise you to defer the step for a fortnight. I would, also, recommend you to take the whole of your family for a short time into the country. Pure air and change of scene are absolutely necessary after their long confinement."

"Farmer Wingfield, of Kensal Green, who sheltered us on our way to Ashdown Park, will, I am sure, receive you," observed Leonard.

"If so, you cannot go to a better place," rejoined the physician.

"I will think of it," returned Mr. Bloundel. And leading the way down stairs, he was welcomed by his wife and children with the warmest demonstrations of delight.

"My fears, you perceive, were groundless," he remarked to Mrs. Bloundel.

"Heaven be praised they were so!" she rejoined. "But I entreat you not to go forth again till all danger is at an end."

"Rest assured I will not," he answered.

Soon after this, Doctor Hodges took his leave, and had already reached the street door, when he was arrested by Patience, who inquired with much anxiety whether he knew anything of Blaize?

"Make yourself easy about him, child," replied the doctor, "I am pretty sure he is safe and sound. He has had the plague certainly; but he left the hospital at Saint Paul's cured."

"O then I *shall* see him again," cried Patience, joyfully. "Poor dear little fellow, it would break my heart to lose him."

"I will make inquiries about him," rejoined Hodges, "and, if I can find him, will send him home."

And without waiting to receive the kitchen-maid's thanks, he departed.

For some days, the grocer continued to pursue

pretty nearly the same line of conduct that he had adopted during the height of the pestilence. But he did not neglect to make preparations for resuming his business; and here Leonard was of material assistance to him. They often spoke of Amabel, and Mr. Bloundel strove, by every argument he was master of, to remove the weight of affliction under which his apprentice laboured. He so far succeeded that Leonard's health improved, though he still seemed a prey to secret sorrow. Things were in this state, when one day a knock was heard at the street-door, and the summons being answered by the grocer's eldest son, Stephen, he returned with the intelligence that a person was without who desired to see Patience. After some consideration, Mr. Bloundel summoned the kitchen-maid, and told her she might admit the stranger into the passage, and hear what he had to say. Patience hastened with a beating heart to the door, expecting to learn some tidings of Blaize, and opening it, admitted a man wrapped in a large cloak, and having a broad-leaved hat pulled over his brows. Stepping into the passage, he threw aside the cloak and raised the hat, discovering the figure and features of Pillichody.

"What brings you here, sir?" demanded Patience in alarm, and glancing over her shoulder to see whether any one observed them. "What do you want?"

"I have brought you news of Blaize," returned

the bully. "But how charmingly you look. By the coral lips of Venus! your long confinement has added to your attractions."

"Never mind my attractions, sir," rejoined Patience, impatiently. "Where is Blaize? Why did he not come with you?"

"Alas!" replied Pillichody, shaking his head in a melancholy manner, "he could not."

"Could not!" half screamed Patience. "Why not?"

"Do not question me," replied Pillichody, feigning to brush away a tear. "He was my friend, and I would rather banish him from my memory. The sight of your beauty transports me so, that by the treasures of Crœsus! I would rather have you without a crown than the wealthiest widow in the country."

"Don't talk nonsense to me in this way," sobbed Patience. "I'm not in the humour for it."

"Nonsense," echoed Pillichody. "I swear to you I am in earnest. By Cupid! I am ravished with your charms." And he would have seized her hand, but Patience hastily withdrew it; and, provoked at his impertinence, dealt him a sound box on the ear. As she did this, she thought she heard a suppressed laugh near her, and looked round, but could see no one. The sound certainly did not proceed from Pillichody, for he looked very red and very angry.

"Do not repeat this affront, mistress," he said to her. "I can bear anything but a blow from your sex."

"Then tell me what has become of Blaize?" she cried.

"I will no longer spare your feelings," he rejoined. "He is defunct."

"Defunct!" echoed Patience, with a scream. "Oh dear me!—I shall never survive it,—I shall die."

"Not while I am left to supply his place," cried Pillichody, catching her in his arms.

"You!" cried Patience, contemptuously, "I would not have you for the world. Where is he buried?"

"In the plague-pit," replied Pillichody. "I attended him during his illness. It was his second attack of the disorder. He spoke of you."

"Did he?—dear little fellow," she exclaimed. "Oh, what did he say?"

"'Tell her,' he cried," rejoined Pillichody, "'that my last thoughts were of her.'"

"Oh, dear! oh, dear!" cried Patience, hysterically.

"'Tell her also,' he added," pursued Pillichody, "'that I trust she will fulfil my last injunction.'"

"That I will," replied Patience. "Name it."

"He conjured you to marry me," replied Pillichody. "I am sure you will not hesitate to comply with the request."

"I don't believe a word of this," cried Patience. "Blaize was a great deal too jealous to bequeath me to another."

"Right, sweetheart, right," cried the individual in question, pushing open the door. "This has all been done to try your fidelity. I am now fully satisfied of your attachment; and am ready to marry you whenever you please."

"So this was all a trick," cried Patience, pettishly, "I wish I had known it, I would have retaliated upon you nicely. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Major Pillichody, to lend a helping hand in such a ridiculous affair."

"I did it to oblige my friend, Blaize," replied Pillichody. "It was agreed between us that if you showed any inconstancy, you were to be mine."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Patience. "I would not advise you to repeat the experiment, Mr. Blaize."

"I never intend to do so, my angel," replied the porter. "I esteem myself the happiest and most fortunate of men."

"You have great reason to do so," observed Pillichody. "I do not despair of supplanting him yet," he muttered to himself. "And now farewell!" he added aloud, "I am only in the way, and, besides, I have no particular desire to encounter Mr. Bloundel or his apprentice." And winking his solitary orb significantly at Patience, he strutted away. It was well he took that oppor-

tunity of departing, for the lovers' raptures were instantly afterwards interrupted by the appearance of Mr. Bloundel, who was greatly delighted to see the porter, and gave him a hearty welcome.

"Ah, sir, I have had a narrow escape," cried Blaize, "and never more expected to see you, or my mother, or Patience. I *have* had the plague, sir, and a terrible disorder it is."

"I heard of your seizure from Leonard Holt," replied Mr. Bloundel. "But where have you been since you left the hospital at Saint Paul's?"

"In the country, sir," rejoined Blaize; "sometimes at one farmhouse, and sometimes at another. I only returned to London yesterday, and met an old friend, whom I begged to go before me, and see that all was right before I ventured in."

"We have all been providentially spared," observed Mr. Bloundel, "and you will find your mother as well as when you last quitted her. You had better go to her."

Blaize obeyed, and was received by old Josyna with a scream of delight. Having embraced him, and sobbed over him, she ran for a bottle of sack, and poured its contents down his throat so hastily as nearly to choke him. She then spread abundance of eatables before him, and after he had eaten and drank his full, offered him as a treat a little of the plague medicine, which she had in reserve.

"No, thank you, mother," replied Blaize. "I

have had enough of *that*. But if there should be a box of rufuses amongst the store you can bring it, as I think a couple might do me good."

Three days after this event, the apprentice was sent forth to ascertain the precise state of the city, as, if all proved favourable, the grocer proposed to open his house on the following day. Leonard set out betimes, and was speedily convinced that all danger was at an end. A severe frost had set in, and had completely purified the air. For the last few days, there had been no deaths of the plague, and but little mortality of any kind. Leonard traversed several of the main streets, and some narrow thoroughfares, and found evidences of restored health and confidence everywhere. It is true there were many houses in which whole families had been swept off still left untenanted. But these were only memorials of the past calamity, and could not be referred to any existing danger. Before returning to Wood Street, an irresistible impulse led him to Finsbury Fields. He passed through the postern east of Cripplegate, and shaped his way towards the lesser plague-pit. The sun, which had been bright all the morning, was now partially obscured; the air had grown thick; and a little snow fell. The ground was blackened and bound by the hard frost, and the stiffened grass felt crisp beneath his feet. Insensible to all external circumstances, he hurried forward, taking the most direct course, and leaping every impediment in his

path. Having crossed several fields, he at length stood before a swollen heap of clay, round which a wooden railing was placed. Springing over the enclosure, and uttering a wild cry that evinced the uncontrollable anguish of his breast, he flung himself upon the mound. He remained for some time in the deepest affliction, and was at last roused by a hand laid upon his shoulder, and raising himself, beheld Thirlby.

"I thought it must be you," said the newcomer, in accents of the deepest commiseration. "I have been visiting yonder plague-pit for the same melancholy purpose as yourself, — to mourn over my lost child. I have been in search of you, and have much to say to you. Will you meet me in this place at midnight to-morrow?"

Leonard signified his assent.

"I am in danger," pursued Thirlby, "for by some means the secret of my existence has been made known, and the officers of justice are in pursuit of me. I suspect that Judith Malmayns is my betrayer. You will not fail me?"

"I will not," returned Leonard.

Upon this, Thirlby hurried away, and leaping a hedge, disappeared from view.

Leonard slowly and sorrowfully returned to Wood Street. On arriving there, he assured his master that he might with entire safety open his house, as he proposed, on the morrow; and Doctor Hodges, who visited the grocer the same even-

ing, confirmed the opinion. Early, therefore, the next morning, Mr. Bloundel summoned his family to prayers; and, after pouring forth his supplications with peculiar fervour and solemnity, he went, accompanied by them all, and threw open the street door. Again kneeling down at the threshold, he prayed fervently as before. He then proceeded to remove the bars and shutters from the windows. The transition from gloom and darkness to bright daylight was almost overpowering. For the first time for six months, the imprisoned family looked forth on the external world, and were dazzled and bewildered by the sight. The grocer himself, despite his sober judgment, could scarcely believe he had not been in a trance during the whole period. The shop was scarcely opened before it was filled with customers, and Leonard and Stephen were instantly employed. But the grocer would sell nothing. To those who asked for any article he possessed, he presented them with it, but would receive no payment.

He next despatched Blaize to bring together all the poor he could find; and distributed among them the remainder of his store,—his casks of flour, his salted meat, his cheeses, his biscuits, his wine,—in short, all that was left.

"This I give," he said, "as a thanksgiving to the Lord, and as a humble testimony of gratitude for my signal deliverance."

CHAPTER II.

THE MIDNIGHT MEETING.

The first day of his deliverance being spent by the grocer in the praiseworthy manner before related, he laid his head upon his pillow with a feeling of satisfaction such as he had not for months experienced. A very remarkable dream occurred to him that night, and its recollection afterwards afforded him the greatest consolation. While thinking of Amabel, and of the delight her presence would have afforded him, slumber stole upon him, and his dreams were naturally influenced by his previous meditations. It appeared to him that he was alone within his house, and while visiting one of the upper rooms which had formerly been appropriated to his lost daughter, he noticed a small door in the wall that had never before attracted his attention. He immediately pushed against it, and, yielding to the touch, it admitted him to an apartment with which he seemed acquainted, though he could not recal the time when he had seen it. It was large and gloomy, panelled with dark and lustrous oak, and filled with rich

but decayed furniture. At the further end stood a large antique bed, hung round with tarnished brocade curtains. The grocer shuddered at the sight, for he remembered to have heard Doctor Hodges assert, that in such a bed, and in such a room as this, his daughter had breathed her last. Some one appeared to be within the bed, and rushing forward with a throbbing heart, and a foreboding of what was to follow, he beheld the form of Amabel. Yes, there she was, with features like those she wore on earth, but clothed with such celestial beauty, and bearing the impress of such serene happiness, that the grocer felt awe-struck as he gazed at her!

"Approach, my father," said the visionary form, in a voice so musical that it thrilled through his frame —"approach, and let what you now hear be for ever graven upon your heart. Do not lament me more, but rather rejoice that I am removed from trouble, and in the enjoyment of supreme felicity. Such a state you will yourself attain. You have run the good race, and will assuredly reap your reward. Comfort my dear mother, my brothers, my little sister, with the assurance of what I tell you, and bid them dry their tears. I can now read the secrets of all hearts, and know how true was Leonard Holt's love for me, and how deep and sincere is his present sorrow. But I am not permitted to appear to him as I now appear to you. Often have I heard him invoke me in accents of the

wildest despair, and have floated past him on the midnight breeze, but could neither impart consolation to him nor make him sensible of my presence, because his grief was sinful. Bid him be comforted. Bid him put a due control upon his feelings. Bid him open his heart anew, and he shall yet be happy, yet love again, and have his love requited. Farewell, dear father!"

And with these words, the curtains of the bed closed. The grocer stretched out his arm to draw them aside, and in the effort awoke. He slept no more that night, but dwelt with unutterable delight on the words he had heard. On rising, his first object was to seek out Leonard, and to relate his vision to him. The apprentice listened in speechless wonder, and remained for some time lost in reflection.

"From any other person than yourself, sir," he said, at length, "I might have doubted this singular story, but coming from you, I attach implicit credence to it. I *will* obey your sainted daughter's injunctions. I *will* struggle against the grief that overwhelms me, and will try to hope that her words may be fulfilled."

"You will do wisely," rejoined Mr. Bloundel. "After breakfast, we will walk together to the farmhouse you spoke of at Kensal Green, and if its owner should prove willing to receive my family for a few weeks, I will remove them thither at once."

Leonard applauded his master's resolution, expressing his firm conviction that Farmer Wingfield would readily accede to the proposal, and the rest of the family having by this time assembled, they sat down to breakfast. As soon as the meal was over, Mr. Bloundel intrusted the care of the shop to Stephen and Blaize, and accompanied by Leonard, set forth. On the way to the west end of the town, the grocer met one or two of his old friends, and they welcomed each other like men risen from the grave. Their course took them through Saint Giles's, where the plague had raged with the greatest severity, and where many houses were still without tenants.

"If all had acted as I have done," sighed the grocer, as he gazed at these desolate habitations, "how many lives, under God's providence, would have been saved!"

"In my opinion, sir," replied Leonard, "you owe your preservation as much to your piety as to your prudence."

"I have placed my trust on high," rejoined the grocer, "and have not been forsaken. And yet many evil-doers have escaped. Amongst others—"

"I know whom you mean, sir," interrupted Leonard, with some fierceness, "but a day of retribution will arrive for him."

"No more of this," rejoined the grocer, severely. "Remember the solemn injunction you have received."

At this moment, they observed a horseman, richly attired, and followed by a couple of attendants, riding rapidly towards them. Both instantly recognized him. The apprentice's cheek and brow flushed with anger, and Mr. Bloundel had much ado to control his emotion. It was the Earl of Rochester, and on seeing them he instantly dismounted, and flinging his bridle to one of the attendants, advanced towards them. Noticing the fury that gleamed in Leonard's eyes, and apprehending some violence on his part, the grocer laid his hand upon his arm, and sternly enjoined him to calm himself.

By this time, the Earl had reached them. "Mr. Bloundel," he said, in a tone of much emotion, and with a look that seemed to bespeak contrition, "I heard that you had opened your house yesterday, and was about to call upon you. I have a few words to say to you on a subject painful to both of us, but doubly painful to me — your daughter."

"I must decline to hear them, my lord," replied the grocer, coldly; "nor shall you ever cross my threshold again with my consent. My poor child is now at peace. You can do her no further injury, and must settle your own account with your Maker."

"Do not refuse me your forgiveness," implored the Earl. "I will make every reparation in my power."

"You *can* make none," replied the grocer, repelling him; "and as to my forgiveness, I neither refuse it nor accord it. I pray your lordship to let me pass. The sole favour I ask of you is to come near me no more."

"I obey you," replied the Earl. "Stay," he added to Leonard, who stood by, regarding him with a look of deadly animosity, "I would give you a piece of caution. Your life is in danger."

"I can easily guess from whom," replied the apprentice, scornfully.

"You mistake," rejoined Rochester; "you have nothing to apprehend from me. You have promised to meet some one to-night," he added, in so low a tone as to be inaudible to the grocer. "Do not go."

"Your lordship's warning will not deter me," rejoined the apprentice.

"As you will," rejoined Rochester, turning away.

And springing upon his horse, and striking his spurs into his side, he dashed off, while Leonard and the grocer took the opposite direction. In less than half an hour, they reached the little village of Paddington, then consisting of a few houses, but now one of the most populous and important parishes of the metropolis, and speedily gained the open country. Even at this dreary season, the country had charms, which Mr. Bloundel, after his long confinement, could fully appreciate. His eye

roamed over the wide prospect; and the leafless trees, the bare hedges, and the frost-bound fields, seemed pleasant in his sight.

He quickened his pace, and being wholly indifferent to the cold, greatly enjoyed the exercise. Leonard pointed out to him the spots where the fugitives from the plague had pitched their tents, and also the pest-house near Westbourne Green, where he himself had been received during his second attack of the distemper, and which was now altogether abandoned.

Soon after this, they mounted the hill beyond Kensal Green, and approached the farm-house. Leonard descried Wingfield near one of the barns, and hailing him, he immediately came forward, On being informed of Mr. Bloundel's desire, he at once assented, and taking them into the house, mentioned the matter to his dame, who was quite of the same opinion as himself.

"The only difference between us," he said to Mr. Bloundel—"is as to the payment you propose. Now I will take none — not a farthing. Come when you please, bring whom you please, and stay as long as you please. But don't offer me anything if you would not offend me. Recollect," he added, the moisture forcing itself into his eyes, and his strong clear voice becoming husky with emotion, "that I loved your daughter for her resemblance to my poor child. She too is gone. I do this for her sake."

Mr. Bloundel shook the worthy man warmly by the hand, but he made no further objection, resolved in his own mind to find some other means of requiting his hospitality. It was then agreed that the grocer should bring his family on the following day, and remain there for a month, and every other arrangement being made, and a hearty meal partaken of, he cordially thanked his host, and returned with Leonard to Wood Street.

In spite of his efforts to resist the impression produced by the Earl's warning, Leonard could not banish it from his mind; and though he did not for a moment think of abandoning his purpose, he resolved to attend the meeting armed. He told Mr. Bloundel he should go out that night, but did not state his object, and the grocer did not inquire it. Blaize sat up with him, and displayed much anxiety to know whither he was going, but, as may be supposed, his curiosity was not gratified. As the clock struck eleven, Leonard thrust a sword into his girdle, and arming himself furthermore with his staff, proceeded towards the door, and bade Blaize lock it after him.

"I shall probably be back in a couple of hours," he said, as he went forth. "You must sit up for me."

"I wonder where he is going?" thought Blaize. "From his gloomy looks, and the weapon he has taken with him, I should judge he is about to

murder some one—perhaps the Earl of Rochester. It must be prevented."

With this view, though perhaps rather more influenced by curiosity than any better feeling, the porter waited a few seconds to allow the apprentice to get out of sight, and then locking the door outside, put the key in his pocket, and followed him. The night was profoundly dark, but he had noticed the direction taken by Leonard, and running noiselessly along the street, soon perceived him a little in advance. Regulating his pace by that of the apprentice, and keeping about fifty yards behind him, he tracked his course along several streets, until he saw him pass through the second postern in the city wall, near Moorgate. Here he debated with himself whether to proceed further or turn back, but at length curiosity got the better of his fears, and he went on. A few steps brought him into the open fields, and fancying he saw Leonard at a little distance before him, he hurried on in that direction. But he soon found he had been deceived by the stump of a tree, and began to fear he must have taken the wrong course. He looked around in vain for some object to guide him. The darkness was so profound that he could see nothing, and he set off again at random, and not without much self-reproach and misgiving. At last, he reached a hedge, and continued to skirt it, until he perceived through the bushes the light of a lantern

in the adjoining field. He immediately called out, but at the cry the light disappeared. This did not prevent him from making towards the spot where he had seen it; but he had not proceeded far when he was forcibly seized by some unseen person, thrown on the ground, and a drawn sword,—for he felt the point,—placed at his throat.

"Utter a cry, and it is your last," cried a stern voice. "Where is he?"

"Who—who?" demanded Blaize, half dead with terror.

"He whom you appointed to meet," replied the unknown.

"I appointed to meet no one," rejoined Blaize.

"Liar!" exclaimed the other—"if you do not instantly lead me to him, I will cut your throat."

"I will lead you wherever you please, if you will only let me get up," rejoined Blaize, with difficulty repressing a cry.

"By the daughters of Nox and Acheron!" exclaimed a voice which sounded like music in the porter's ears, "I think you are mistaken in your man, my lord. It does not sound like the apprentice's voice."

"It is *not* the apprentice's voice, good Major Pillichody," rejoined the porter. "It is mine, your friend—Blaize's."

"Blaize!" exclaimed Pillichody, unmasking a dark lantern, and revealing the terror-stricken

countenance of the porter — "so it is. In the devil's name, what are you doing here?"

"The devil himself, who put it into my head to come, only knows," replied Blaize; "but I followed Leonard Holt."

"Which way did he take?" asked the person who had assailed him.

"I cannot exactly say," replied Blaize, "but he seemed to go straight into the fields."

"He is no doubt gone to the plague-pit," replied the other. "You are now at liberty," he added to Blaize, "and I counsel you to make the best of your way home. Say nothing to your master of what has occurred. The city walls lie in that direction."

Overjoyed to be released, Blaize ran off as fast as his legs could carry him, and never stopped till he reached Moorgate.

Meanwhile, Leonard had reached the place of meeting. As he stood by the rail surrounding the plague-pit, he thought of Mr. Bloundel's singular dream, and almost hoping to be similarly favoured, flung himself on his knees, and besought Amabel, if it were possible, to appear to him. But his entreaties produced no result. The chill blast whistled past him, and mindful of what had been told him, he was fain to interpret this into an answer to his request. The night was bitterly cold, and Leonard, whose limbs were almost stiffened by long kneeling, walked round and round

the enclosure at a quick pace to put his blood into circulation. As the hour of midnight was tolled forth by the neighbouring churches, he heard footsteps, and could just detect a figure advancing towards him.

"Are you there?" was asked in the voice of Thirlby.

Leonard replied in the affirmative, and the other instantly joined him.

"Have you mentioned our meeting to any one?" inquired Leonard. "I ask because I was warned by the Earl of Rochester not to attend it."

"Strange!" exclaimed Thirlby, musingly. "However, do not let us waste time. I am about to leave London, perhaps this country,—for ever. But I could not depart without an interview with you. You are aware of my strong attachment to my poor lost child. My daughter Isabella now supplies her place in my heart. She is the only being I love on earth, for my son has alienated himself from my affections. All I desire is to see her happy. This I find can only be accomplished in one way."

Here he paused for a moment, but as Leonard made no remark, he proceeded.

"Why should I hesitate to declare it," he said, "since it was for that object I brought you hither. She loves you—devotedly loves you, and if her wishes were opposed, I should tremble for the con-

sequences. Now, listen to me. Situated as you are, you never can wed her. I will, however, point out a means by which you can raise yourself to distinction in a short time, and so entitle yourself to claim her hand. I will supply you with money — more than you can require — will place you at court — near the King's person—and if you act under my direction, your rise is certain. I have extorted a promise to this effect from my son. I told him my object, and that if he did not make your fortune, I could ruin him by revealing myself. I may, perhaps, pay the penalty of my crime on the scaffold; but I may also escape. In the latter case, my reappearance would be fatal to him. He has consented to co-operate with me—to watch over your fortunes — and as soon as you have attained sufficient eminence to bestow his sister upon you. Now do you understand?"

"I do," replied Leonard; "and I understand also against whom the Earl of Rochester warned me."

"And you consent?" demanded Thirlby.

Leonard was about to answer, when he felt a light and trembling hand placed upon his own.

"Do not answer inconsiderately, Leonard," said a low, sweet voice, which he recognized as that of the Lady Isabella; "I am here to receive your determination."

"I am glad of it," replied the apprentice. "The deep devotion you have displayed towards

me deserves to be requited. I will strive to render myself worthy of you, and I feel that by so doing I shall best fulfil the injunctions of her who lies beside us. Henceforth, Lady Isabella, I wholly devote myself to you."

A murmur of delight escaped her.

"My blessings on you both!" exclaimed her father. "Give me your hand, Isabella," he added, taking it and placing it in that of the apprentice. "Here, beside the grave of her whom you both loved, I affiance you. Pursue the course I point out to you, Leonard, and she will soon be yours."

As he spoke, the light of a lantern was suddenly thrown upon them, disclosing two persons who had noiselessly approached. They were Lord Argentine and Pillichody.

"You affirm more than you have warrant for, my lord," said the former. "I will never consent to this ill-assorted and dishonourable union; and so far from permitting it, will oppose it to the utmost of my power. If this presumptuous apprentice dares to raise his views towards my sister, let him look to himself. Your safety lies in instant flight. The officers are in search of you."

"They shall find me," replied Thirlby, sternly.

"As you please," rejoined Argentine. "Come with me, Isabella," he added to his sister.

But she flew with a cry towards Leonard.

"Ah!" exclaimed her brother, drawing his

sword. "Do you dare to detain her? Deliver her to me, villain, instantly?"

"Not when thus menaced, my lord," rejoined Leonard, likewise drawing his sword, and standing upon the defensive.

"Then look to yourself," replied Argentine, assaulting him.

Isabella uttered a wild shriek, and Thirlby tried to rush between them. But before they could be separated, Lord Argentine's fury had exposed him to his adversary, whose sword passed through his body. He fell to the ground, weltering in his blood.

While Leonard stood stupified and confounded at what had occurred, and Isabella, uttering a loud cry, threw herself upon the body and tried to stanch the wound, — two men, with halberts in their hands, rushed forward, and seizing Thirlby, cried, "We arrest you as a murderer!"

Thirlby, who seemed utterly overcome by surprise and horror, offered no resistance.

At this juncture, Leonard felt his arm seized by a bystander—he did not know whom—and scarcely conscious of what was taking place, suffered himself to be dragged from the scene.

END OF THE FIFTH BOOK.

Book the Sixth.

SEPTEMBER 1666.

CHAPTER I.

THE FIRE-BALL.

About nine o'clock on the night of Saturday, the 2nd of September, 1666—and rather more than nine months after the incidents last related,—three men took their way from Smithfield to Islington. They proceeded at a swift pace and in silence, until, having mounted the steep hill on which the suburb in question is situated, they halted at a short distance from the high walls surrounding the great water-works formed by the New River-head. The night was dark, but free from cloud, in consequence of a strong easterly wind which prevailed at the time.

"It is dark in London now," observed one of the three persons to his companions as he cast his eye in the direction of the great city, that lay buried in gloom beneath them; "but there will be light enough soon."

"A second dawn, and brighter than the first, shall arise upon it," replied one of his companions, a tall gaunt man, whose sole covering was a sheepskin, girded round his loins. "Such a flame shall

be kindled within it, as hath not been seen since showers of brimstone and fire descended upon the sinful cities of the plain. 'The Lord shall come with flames of fire,'" he added, pointing his long staff towards the city. "'He shall make them like a fiery oven, in the time of his wrath. They shall be utterly consumed.'"

"Amen!" exclaimed the third person, who stood near him, in a deep voice, and with something of a foreign accent.

"Not so loud, friends," rejoined the first speaker. "Let us set about the task. I will ascertain that no one is on the watch."

With this, he moved towards the water-works, and skirting the circular walls, to satisfy himself that all was secure, he returned to his companions, and they proceeded to the principal entrance to the place. Noiselessly unlocking the gates, the leader of the party admitted the others into an open space of some extent, in the midst of which was a large reservoir of water. He then gave each of them a small key, and bidding them use despatch, they began to turn the cocks of the leaden pipes connected with the reservoir, while he hastened to the further end of the enclosure, and employed himself in a similar manner. In this way, and in less than a quarter of an hour, the whole of the cocks were stopped.

"And now give me the keys," said the leader.

Taking them as they were offered, he added

his own to the number, and flung them as far as he could into the reservoir, laughing slightly as the noise of the splash occasioned by their fall into the water reached his ears.

"They will not be found till this pool is drained," he observed to his companions. "And now let us go. Our business here is done."

"Stay yet a moment," cried Solomon Eagle, who was standing at the brink of the reservoir, with his eyes fixed upon it. "Stay!" he cried, arresting him. "A vision rises before me. I see in this watery mirror a representation of the burning city. And what are those fearful forms that feed the flames? Fiends, in our likeness—fiends! And see how wide and far the conflagration spreads. The whole city is swallowed up by an earthquake. It sinks to the bottomless pit—down, down!"

"No more of this," cried the leader impatiently. "Come along."

And followed by the others, he rushed to the gates, and locking them after him, flung the key away.

"A hundred pounds was paid to the servant of the chief officer of the works to bring those keys to me," he said, "and he executed his commission faithfully and well. Water will be vainly sought for to quench the conflagration."

"I like not the vision I have just beheld," said Solomon Eagle, in a troubled tone. "It seems to portend mischief."

"Think of it no more," rejoined the leader, "or regard it as it was,—a phantom created by your overheated imagination. Yon city has sinned so deeply, that it is the will of Heaven it should be destroyed; and it has been put into our hearts by the Supreme Power to undertake the terrible task. We are the chosen instruments of the divine displeasure. Everything favours the design,—the long-continued dry weather,—the strong easterly wind, which will bear the flames into the heart of the city,—the want of water, occasioned by the stopping of these pipes, the emptying of the various aqueducts, and the destruction of the Thames water-tower, which we have accomplished. Everything favours it, I say, and proves that the hand of Heaven directs us. Yes, London shall fall. We have received our commission from on high, and must execute it, regardless of the consequences. For my own part, I feel as little compunction at the task, as the thunder-bolt launched from on high does for the tree it shivers."

"Philip Grant has uttered my sentiments exactly," said the man, who it has been mentioned spoke with a slight foreign accent, "I have neither misgiving nor compunction. You appear to have forgotten your own denunciations, brother."

"Not so, Robert Hubert," rejoined the enthusiast, "and I now recognise in the vision a delusion of the Evil One to turn me from my holy purpose. But it has failed. The impious and im-

penitent city is doomed, and nothing can save it. And yet I would fain see it once more, as I beheld it this morn when day arose upon it for the last time, from the summit of Saint Paul's. It looked so beautiful that my heart smote me, and tears started to my eyes, to think that those goodly habitations, those towers, temples, halls, and palaces, should so soon be levelled with the dust."

"Hear what the prophet saith," rejoined Hubert. "'Thou hast defiled thy sanctuaries by the multitude of thine iniquities, by the iniquity of thy traffic. Therefore, will I bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, and will bring thee to ashes upon the earth, in the sight of all them that behold thee.'"

Solomon Eagle flung himself upon his knees, and his example was imitated by the others. Having recited a prayer in a low deep tone, he arose, and stretching out his arms, solemnly denounced the city. As he pronounced the words, a red and fiery star shot from the dark vault of the sky, and seemed to fall in the midst of the city.

"Did you not see that sign?" cried Grant, eagerly. "It heralds us to our task."

So saying, he ran swiftly down the hill, and, followed by the others, did not slacken his pace till they reached the city. They then shaped their course more slowly towards Saint Paul's, and

having gained the precincts of the cathedral, Solomon Eagle, who now assumed the place of leader, conducted them to a small door on the left of the great northern entrance, and unlocking it, ushered them into a narrow passage behind the rich carved work of the choir. Traversing it, they crossed the mid aisle, and soon reached the steps leading to Saint Faith's. It was profoundly dark, but they were all well acquainted with the road, and did not miss their footing. It required, however, some caution to thread the ranks of the mighty pillars filling the subterranean church. But at last this was accomplished, and they entered the vault beyond the charnel, where they found Chowles and Judith Malmayns. The former was wrapped in a long black cloak, and was pacing to and fro within the narrow chamber. When Solomon Eagle appeared, he sprang towards him, and regarding him inquiringly, cried, "Have you done it?—have you done it?"

The enthusiast replied in the affirmative.

"Heaven be praised!" exclaimed Chowles. And he skipped about with the wildest expressions of delight. A gleam of satisfaction, too, darted from Judith's savage eyes. She had neither risen nor altered her position on the arrival of the party, but she now got up, and addressed the enthusiast. A small iron lamp, suspended by a chain from the vaulted roof, lighted the chamber. The most noticeable figure amidst the group was

that of Solomon Eagle, who with his blazing eyes, long jet black locks, giant frame, and tawny skin, looked like a supernatural being. Near him stood the person designated as Robert Hubert. He was a young man, and appeared to have lived a life of great austerity. His features were thin; his large black eyes set in deep caverns; his limbs seemed almost destitute of flesh; and his looks wild and uncertain like those of an insane person. His tattered and threadbare garb resembled that of a French ecclesiastic. The third person, who went by the name of Philip Grant, had a powerful frame, though somewhat bent, and a haughty deportment and look, greatly at variance with his miserable attire and haggard looks. His beard was long and grizzled, and his features, though sharpened by care, retained some traces of a noble expression. A few minutes having passed in conversation, Grant observed to the enthusiast, "I must now leave you for a short time. Give me the key that I may let myself out."

"You are not going to betray us?" cried Chowles, suspiciously.

"Why should I betray you?" rejoined Grant, sternly. "I am too anxious for the event to disclose it."

"True, true," replied Chowles.

"*I* do not distrust you, brother," observed Solomon Eagle, giving him the key.

"I know whither you are going," observed

Judith Malmayns. "You are about to warn Mr. Blondel and his partner,—apprentice no longer,—Leonard Holt, of the approaching conflagration. But your care will be thrown away."

"Does she speak the truth, brother?" demanded Hubert, raising his eyes from the Bible which he was reading in the corner of the vault.

"I will do nothing to endanger the design," rejoined Grant. "Of that rest assured."

With this, he strode forth, traversed Saint Faith's, and, notwithstanding the gloom, reached without difficulty the little door by which he had entered the cathedral. Issuing from it, he took the way, as Judith had surmised, to Wood Street, and pausing before the grocer's door, knocked against it.

The summons was presently answered by Blaize; and to Grant's inquiries whether his master was within, he replied. "Which of my masters do you mean? I have two."

"The younger," replied Grant,—"Leonard Holt."

"So far you are fortunate," rejoined Blaize. "Mr. Blondel has retired to rest, but Mr. Holt is still down stairs. Pray what may be your business with him at this hour? It should be important."

"It *is* important," rejoined Grant, "and does not admit of a moment's delay. Tell him so."

Eyeing the stranger with a look of suspicion,

the porter was about to enter into a parley with him, when Leonard himself cut it short, and learning the nature of the application, desired Grant to follow him into the adjoining room. The nine months which had passed over Leonard's head since he was last brought under notice, had wrought a material change in his appearance. He had a grave and thoughtful air, somewhat inclining to melancholy, but in other respects he was greatly improved. His health was completely restored, and the thoughtful expression added character to his handsome physiognomy, and harmonized well with his manly and determined bearing. He was habited plainly, but with some degree of taste. As Judith Malmayns had intimated, he was now Mr. Bloundel's partner, and his whole appearance denoted his improved circumstances. The alteration did not escape the notice of the stranger, who regarded him with much curiosity, and closed the door behind him as he entered the room.

"You are looking much better than when we last met, Leonard Holt," he said, in tones that made his hearer start, "and I am glad to perceive it. Prosperity seems to attend your path, and you deserve it; whereas, misery and every other ill—and I deserve them—dog mine."

"I did not recognise you at first, Mr. Thirlby," replied Leonard—"for, in truth, you are much changed. But you desire to speak with me on

a matter of importance. Can I aid you? You may need money. Here is my purse."

"I do not want it," replied the other, scornfully rejecting the offer. "I have a proposal to make to you."

"I shall be glad to hear it," replied Leonard. "But first tell me how you effected your escape after your arrest on that disastrous night when, in self-defence, and unintentionally, I wounded your son, Lord Argentine."

"Would you had killed him!" cried the other, fiercely. "I have lost all feelings of a father for him. He it was who contrived my arrest, and he would have gladly seen me borne to the scaffold, certain it would have freed him from me for ever. I was hurried away by the officers from the scene of strife, and conveyed to the Tun at Cornhill, which you know has been converted into a round-house, and where I was locked up for the night. But while I was lying on the floor of my prison, driven well nigh frantic by what had occurred, there were two persons without labouring to effect my deliverance,—nor did they labour in vain. These were Chowles and Judith, my foster-sister, and whom, you may remember, I suspected,—and most unfairly,—of intending my betrayal. By means of a heavy bribe, they prevailed on one of the officers to connive at my escape. An iron bar was removed from the window of my prison, and I got through the aperture. Judith concealed me

for some days in the vaults of Saint Faith's, after which I fled into the country, where I wandered about for several months, under the name of Philip Grant. Having learnt that my son, though severely hurt by you, had recovered from his wound, and that his sister, the Lady Isabella, had accompanied him to his seat in Staffordshire, I proceeded thither, and saw her, unknown to him. I found her heart still true to you. She told me you had disappeared immediately after the termination of the conflict, and had not been heard of till her brother was out of danger, when you returned to Wood Street."

"The information was correct," replied Leonard. "I was dragged away by a person whom I did not recognize at the time, but who proved to be the Earl of Rochester. He conducted me to a place of safety, thrust a purse into my hand, and left me. As soon as I could do so with safety, I returned to my master's house. But how long have you been in London?"

"Nearly a month," replied Grant. "And now, let me ask you one question. Do you ever think of Isabella?"

"Often, very often," replied Leonard. "But as I dare not indulge the hope of a union with her, I have striven to banish her image from my mind."

"She cannot forget *you*, Leonard," rejoined Grant. "And now to my proposal. I have another plan for your aggrandizement that cannot

fail. I am in possession of a monstrous design, the revelation of which will procure you whatever you desire. Ask a title from the King, and he will give it; and when in possession of that title, demand the hand of the Lady Isabella, and her proud brother will not refuse you. Call in your porter — seize me. I will offer a feigned resistance. Convey me before the King. Make your own terms with him. He will accede to them. Will you do it?"

"No," replied Leonard, "I will not purchase the daughter at the price of the father's life."

"Heed me not," replied Grant, supplicatingly. "I am wholly indifferent to life. And what matters it whether I am dragged to the scaffold for one crime or another."

"You plead in vain," returned Leonard, firmly.

"Reflect," cried Grant, in an agonized tone. "A word from you will not only win you Isabella, but save the city from destruction."

"Save the city!" exclaimed Leonard. "What mean you?"

"Swear to comply with my request, and you shall know. But not otherwise," replied Grant.

"I cannot—I cannot," rejoined Leonard; "and unfortunately you have said too much for your own safety. I must, though most reluctantly, detain you."

"Hear me, Leonard, and consider well what you do," cried Grant, planting himself before the

door. "I love you next to my daughter, and chiefly because she loves you. I have told you I have a design to discover, to which I am a party,—a hellish, horrible design,—which threatens this whole city with destruction. It is your duty, having told you thus much, to arrest me, and I will offer no resistance. Will you not turn this to your own advantage? Will you not make a bargain with the King?"

"I have said I will not," rejoined Leonard.

"Then be warned by me," rejoined Grant. "Arouse your master. Pack up all your goods, and make preparations for instant flight, for the danger will invade you before you are aware of it."

"Is it fire?" demanded Leonard, upon whose mind the denunciations of Solomon Eagle now rushed.

"You will see," replied Grant, with a terrible laugh. "You will repent your determination when it is too late. Farewell."

"Hold!" cried Leonard, advancing towards him, and trying to lay hands upon him, "I arrest you in the King's name."

"Off!" exclaimed Grant, dashing him forcibly backwards.

And striking down Blaize, who tried to stop him in the passage, he threw open the street door, and disappeared.

Fearful of pursuit, Grant took a circuitous route

to Saint Paul's, and it was full half an hour after the interview above related, before he reached the cathedral. Just as he passed through the small door, the clock tolled forth the hour of midnight, and when he gained the mid aisle, he heard footsteps approaching, and encountered his friends.

"We had given you up," said Chowles, "and fearing you intended us some treachery, were about to do the job without you."

"I have been unavoidably detained," replied Grant. "Let us about it at once."

"I have got the fire-balls with me," observed Hubert.

"It is well," returned Grant.

Quitting the cathedral, they proceeded to Thames Street, and tracking it to Fish Street Hill, struck off on the right into an alley that brought them to Pudding Lane.

"This is the house," said Chowles, halting before a two-storied, wooden habitation, over the door of which was suspended the sign of the Wheat Sheaf, with the name THOMAS FARRYNER, BAKER, inscribed beneath it.

"And here," said Hubert, "shall begin the Great Fire of London."

As he said this, he gave a fire-ball to Solomon Eagle, who lighted the fuze at Chowles's lantern. The enthusiast then approached a window of the baker's shop, and breaking a small pane of glass within it, threw the fire-ball into the room. It

alighted upon a heap of chips and fagots lying near a large stack of wood used for the oven, and in a few minutes the whole pile had caught and burst into a flame, which quickly mounting to the ceiling, set fire to the old, dry, half-decayed timber that composed it.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST NIGHT OF THE FIRE.

HAVING seen the stack of wood kindled, and the flames attack the building in such a manner as to leave no doubt they would destroy it, the incendiaries separated, previously agreeing to meet together in half an hour at the foot of London Bridge; and while the others started off in different directions, Chowles and Judith retreated to a neighbouring alley commanding a view of the burning habitation.

"At last the great design is executed," observed Chowles, rubbing his hands gleefully. "The fire burns right merrily, and will not soon be extinguished. Who would have thought we should have found such famous assistants as the two madmen, Solomon Eagle and Robert Hubert—and your scarcely less mad foster-brother, Philip Grant? I can understand the motives that influenced the two first to the deed, but not those of the other."

"Nor I," replied Judith, "unless he wishes in some way or other to benefit Leonard Holt by it. For my part, I shall enjoy this fire quite as much on its own account as for the plunder it will bring

us. I should like to see every house in this great city destroyed."

"You are in a fair way of obtaining your wish," replied Chowles,—"but provided I have the sacking of them, I don't care how many are saved. Not but that such a fire will be a grand sight, which I should be sorry to miss. You forget, too, that if Saint Paul's should be burnt down, we shall lose our hoards. However, there's no chance of that."

"Not much," replied Judith, interrupting him. "But see! the baker has at last discovered that his dwelling is on fire. He bursts open the window, and, as I live, is about to throw himself out of it."

As she spoke, one of the upper windows in the burning habitation was burst open, and a poor terrified wretch appeared at it in his night dress, vociferating in tones of the wildest alarm, "Fire! fire! — help, help!"

"Shall we go forward?" said Chowles.

Judith hesitated for a moment, and then assenting, they hurried towards the spot.

"Can we give you any help, friend?" cried Chowles.

"Take care of this," rejoined the baker, flinging a bag of money to the ground, "and I will endeavour to let down my wife and children. The staircase is on fire, and we are almost stifled with smoke. God help us!"

And the exclamation was followed by fearful shrieks from within, followed by the appearance of a woman, holding two little children in her arms, at the window.

"This must be money," said Judith, utterly heedless of the fearful scene occurring above, and taking up the bag and chinking it. "Silver, by the sound. Shall we make off with it?"

"No, no," replied Chowles, "we must not run any risk for such a paltry booty. Let us bide our time."

At this juncture, the baker, who had disappeared for a few seconds from the window, again presented himself at it, and, with some difficulty, forced a feather bed through it, which was instantly placed by Chowles in such a position beneath as to break the fall of the descending parties. Tying a couple of sheets together, and fastening one end round his wife's waist, the baker lowered her and the children to the ground. They alighted in safety; but just as he was about to follow their example, the floor of the room gave way, and though he succeeded in springing through the window, he missed the feather bed, and broke his leg in the fall. He was picked up by Chowles and Judith, and placed upon the bed in a state of insensibility, and was soon afterwards conveyed with his family to the house of a neighbour.

Meanwhile, the fire had spread to the houses on either side of the unfortunate man's habitation,

and both of them being built entirely of wood, they were almost instantly in flames. The alarm, too, had become general, — the inhabitants of the adjoining houses were filled with indescribable terror, and the narrow street was speedily crowded with persons of both sexes who had rushed from their beds to ascertain the extent of the danger. All was terror and confusion. The fire-bells of Saint Margaret's, Saint George's, and Saint Andrew's, in Botolph Lane, began to toll, and shouts were heard on every side, proving that the whole neighbourhood was roused.

To add to the general distress, a report was raised that a house in Fish Street Hill was on fire, and it was soon found to be true, as an immense volume of flames burst forth in that quarter. While the rest of the spectators, distracted by this calamity, and hardly knowing what to do, hurried in the direction of the new fire, Chowles and Judith eyed each other askance, and the former whispered to his companion, " That is another piece of Hubert's handiwork."

The two wretches now thought it time to bestir themselves. So much confusion prevailed, that they were wholly unobserved, and under the plea of rendering assistance, they entered houses and carried off whatever excited their cupidity, or was sufficiently portable. No wealthy house had been attacked as yet, and therefore their spoil was but trifling. The poor baker seemed to be the bearer

of ill-luck, for he had not been many minutes in his new asylum before it likewise caught fire. Another house, too, in Fish Street Hill, and lower down than the first, was observed to be burning, and as this was out of the current of the wind, and consequently could not have been occasioned by the showers of sparks that marked its course, a cry was instantly raised that incendiaries were abroad, and several suspicious-looking persons were seized in consequence.

Meantime, no efforts had been made to stop the progress of the original conflagration in Pudding Lane, which continued to rage with the greatest fury, spreading from house to house with astonishing rapidity. All the buildings in this neighbourhood being old, and of wood, which was as dry as tinder, a spark alighting upon them would have sufficed to set them on fire. It may be conceived, therefore, what must have been the effect of a vast volume of flame, fanned by a powerful wind. House after house caught, as if constructed of touchwood, and the fire roared and raged to such a degree, that those who stood by were too much terrified to render any effectual assistance. Indeed, the sole thought that now seemed to influence all was the preservation of a portion of their property. No one regarded his neighbour, or the safety of the city. The narrow street was instantly filled with goods and furniture of all kinds, thrown out of the windows or pushed out of

the doors, but such was the fierceness of the fire, and the extraordinary rapidity with which it advanced, that the very articles attempted to be saved were seized by it, and thus formed a means of conveying it to the opposite houses.

In this way, a number of persons were enclosed for a short time between two fires, and seemed in imminent danger of being burned to death. The perilous nature of their situation was, moreover, increased by a sudden and violent gust of wind, which, blowing the flames right across the street, seemed to envelope all within them. The shrieks that burst from the poor creatures thus involved were most appalling. Fortunately, they sustained no greater damage than was occasioned by the fright and a slight scorching, for the next moment the wind shifted, and, sweeping back the flames, they were enabled to effect their retreat. Chowles and Judith were among the sufferers, and in the alarm of the moment lost all the booty they had obtained.

Soon after this, the whole street was on fire. All idea of preserving their property was therefore abandoned by the inhabitants, and they thought only of saving themselves. Hundreds of half-naked persons of both sexes rushed towards Thames Street in search of a place of refuge. The scene was wholly without parallel for terror. Many fires had occurred in London, but none that raged with such fierceness as the present conflagration,

or promised to be so generally destructive. It gathered strength and fury each moment, now rising high into the air in a towering sheet of flame, now shooting forward like an enormous dragon vomiting streams of fire upon its foes.

All at once, the flames changed colour, and were partially obscured by a thick black smoke. A large warehouse filled with resin, tar, and other combustible matters, had caught fire, and the dense vapour proceeded from the burning pitch. But it cleared off in a few minutes, and the flames burnt more brightly and fiercely than ever.

Up to this time, none of the civic authorities having arrived, several persons set off to give information of the calamity to the Lord Mayor (Sir Thomas Bludworth), and the other magistrates. A small party of the watch were on the spot, but they were unable to render any effectual assistance. As the conflagration advanced, those occupying houses in its track quitted them, and left their goods a prey to the numerous plunderers, who were now gathered together pursuing their vocation like unhallowed beings amid the raging element. The whole presented a scene of the wildest alarm, confusion, and licence. Vociferations, oaths, shrieks, and outcries of every description stunned the ear. Night was turned into day. The awful roaring of the flames was ever and anon broken by the thundering fall of some heavy roof. Flakes of fire were scattered far and

wide by the driving wind, carrying destruction wherever they alighted, and spreading the conflagration on all sides till it seemed like a vast wedge of fire driven into the heart of the city. And thus it went on, swallowing up all before it, like an insatiate monster, and roaring for very joy.

Meanwhile, the incendiaries had met, as concerted, near the foot of the bridge, and all except Philip Grant seemed to rejoice in the progress of the conflagration. Chowles made some comment upon his moody looks and silence, and whispered in his ear, "You have now an opportunity of retrieving your fortune, and may make yourself richer than your son. Take my advice and do not let it pass."

"Away, tempter!" cried Grant — "I have lighted a fire within my breast which never will be quenched."

"Poh, poh!" rejoined Judith —"Do not turn faint-hearted now."

"The fire rages fiercely," cried Solomon Eagle, gazing at the vast sheet of flame overtopping the buildings near them, "but we must keep it alive. Take the remainder of the fire-balls, Hubert, and cast them into some of the old houses in Crooked Lane."

Hubert prepared to obey.

"I will go with you and point out the best spots," said Chowles. "Our next place of rendezvous must be the vaults beneath Saint Faith's."

"Agreed!" exclaimed the others. And they again separated,—Hubert and Chowles to kindle fresh fires, and Grant to watch the conflagration at a distance. As to Solomon Eagle, he rushed towards the scene of destruction, and forcing himself into the midst of the crowd, mounted a post, crying in a loud voice—

"I told you a second judgment would come upon you on account of your iniquities, and you now find that I avouched the truth. The Lord himself hath come to preach to you, as he did in the fiery mount of Sinai, and a terrible exhortation it shall be, and one ye shall not easily forget. This fire shall not be quenched till the whole city is laid prostrate. Ye doubted my words when I told you of the plague; ye laughed at me, and scoffed me; but ye became believers in the end, and now conviction is forced upon you a second time. You will vainly attempt to save your dwellings. It is the Lord's will they should be destroyed, and man's efforts to avert the judgment will be ineffectual!"

While the majority listened to him with fear and trembling, and regarded him as a prophet, a few took the opposite view of the question, and coupling his appearance with the sudden outbreak of the fire, were disposed to regard him as an incendiary. They, therefore, cried out—"He has se fire to our houses. Down with him! down with him!"

Other voices joined in the outcry, and an attempt was made to carry the menace into effect; but a strong party rallied round the enthusiast, who derided the attempts of his opponents. Planting himself on the steps of Saint Margaret's church, he continued to pour forth exhortations to the crowd, until he was driven into the interior of the pile by the fast-approaching flames. The whole body of the church was filled with poor wretches who had sought refuge within it, having brought with them such of their goods as they were able to carry off. But it soon became evident that the sacred structure would be destroyed, and their screams and cries on quitting it were truly heart-rending. Solomon Eagle was the last to go forth, and he delayed his departure till the flames burst through the windows. Another great storehouse of oil, tar, cordage, hemp, flax, and other highly-inflammable articles, adjoining the church, had caught fire, and the flames speedily reached the sacred fabric. The glass within the windows was shivered; the stone bars split asunder; and the seats and other wood-work withinside catching fire, the flames ascended to the roof, and kindled its massive rafters.

Great efforts were now made to check the fire. A few of the cumbrous and unmanageable engines of the day were brought to the spot, but no water could be obtained. All the aqueducts, pipes and sluices were dry, and the Thames water-tower

was found to be out of order, and the pipes connected with it empty. To add to the calamity, the tide was out, and it was not only difficult, but dangerous, to obtain water from the river. The scanty supply served rather to increase than check the flames.

All sorts of rumours prevailed among the crowd. It could no longer be doubted that the fire, which kept continually breaking out in fresh places, was the work of incendiaries, and it was now supposed that it must have been caused by the French or the Dutch, with both of which nations the country was then at war, and the most fearful anticipations, that it was only the prelude of a sudden invasion were entertained. Some conjectured it might be the work of the Papists; and it chancing that a professor of that religion was discovered among the mob, he was with difficulty rescued from their fury by the watch, and conveyed to Newgate. Other persons, who were likewise suspected of being incendiaries, were conveyed with him.

This, though it satisfied the multitude, did not check the progress of the fire, nor put a stop to the terror and tumult that prevailed. Every moment, a fresh family were turned into the street, and by their cries added to the confusion. The plunderers had formed themselves into bands, pillaging everything they could lay hands on—carrying off boxes, goods, and coffers, breaking into

cellars, broaching casks of spirits and ale, and emptying flasks of wine. Hundreds of persons who did not join in the pillage made free with the contents of the cellars, and a large portion of the concourse was soon in a state of intoxication.

Thus, wild laughter and exclamations of frenzied mirth were heard amid the wailings of women and the piteous cries of children. It was indeed dreadful to see old and bed-ridden people forced into the street to seek a home where they could; nor yet less dreadful to behold others roused from a bed of sickness at dead of night, and by such a fearful summons. Still, fanned by the wind, and fed by a thousand combustible matters, the fire pressed fearfully on, devouring all before it, and increasing in fury and power each instant; while the drunken mob laughed, roared, shouted, and rejoiced beside it, as if in emulation of the raging flames.

To proceed for a moment to Wood Street. When Philip Grant quitted Leonard in the manner before related, the latter followed him to the door, and saw him disappear in the gloom. But he did not attempt pursuit, because he could not persuade himself that any danger was really to be apprehended. He thought it, however, advisable to consult with Mr. Bloundel on the subject, and accordingly proceeded to his room and roused him.

After hearing what had occurred, the grocer looked very grave, and said, "I am not disposed

to treat this matter so lightly as you do, Leonard. I fear this unhappy man has some desperate design in view. What it is I cannot — dare not — conjecture. But I confess I am full of apprehension. I shall not retire to rest to-night, but shall hold myself in readiness to act in whatever way may be necessary. You had better go forth, and if anything occurs, give notice to the proper authorities. We have not now such a Lord Mayor as we had during the season of the plague. The firm and courageous Sir John Lawrence is but ill succeeded by the weak and vacillating Sir Thomas Bludworth. Still, the latter may be equal to this emergency, and if anything happens, you must apply to him."

"I will follow your advice implicitly," rejoined Leonard. "At the same time, I think, there is nothing to apprehend."

"It is better to err on the safe side," observed the grocer. "You cannot then reproach yourself with want of caution."

Shortly after this, Leonard sallied forth, and having determined what course to pursue in the first instance, proceeded to Saint Paul's. He found every door in the sacred structure fast closed. Not satisfied with this, he knocked at the great northern entrance till the summons was answered by a verger, and stating his object, demanded to be admitted, and to search the cathedral, as well as Saint Faith's The verger offered no ob-

jection, and having examined the old building throughout, without discovering any traces of the person he was in quest of, Leonard quitted it.

More than ever convinced that he was right in his supposition, and that no danger was to be apprehended, he was about to return home, when the idea occurred to him that he might perhaps find Grant at the plague-pit in Finsbury Fields, and he accordingly shaped his course thither. A long period had elapsed since he had last visited the melancholy spot, and it was not without much painful emotion that he drew near the vast mound covering the victims of the pestilence. But Grant was not there, and though he paced round and round the dreary enclosure for some time, no one came. He then proceeded to the lesser plague-pit, and kneeling beside the grave of Amabel, bedewed it with his tears.

As he arose, with the intention of returning to Wood Street, he observed an extraordinary light in the sky a little to the left, evidently produced by the reflection of a great fire in that direction. On beholding this light, he said to himself, "Mr. Bloundel was right. That is the danger with which the city was threatened. It is now too late to avert it."

Determined, however, to ascertain the extent of the calamity without an instant's loss of time, he set off at a swift pace, and in less than half an hour, reached Fish Street Hill, and stood beside

the conflagration. It was then nearly three o'clock, and a vast chasm of blackening ruins proclaimed the devastation that had been committed. Just as he arrived, the roof of Saint Margaret's fell in with a tremendous crash, and for a few minutes the fire was subdued. It then arose with greater fury than ever; burst out on both sides of the sacred structure, and caught the line of houses leading towards London Bridge. The first house was that of a vintner; and the lower part of the premises—the cellars and vaults—were filled with wine and spirits. These instantly blazed up, and burnt with such intensity that the adjoining habitation was presently in flames.

"I know who has done all this!" exclaimed Leonard, half involuntarily, as he gazed at the work of destruction.

"Indeed!" exclaimed a bystander, gazing at him. "Who is it?—the Dutchman or the Frenchman?"

"Neither," replied Leonard, who at that moment discovered Grant among the group opposite him. "Yonder stands the incendiary!"

CHAPTER III.

PROGRESS OF THE FIRE.

Instantly surrounded and seized by the mob, Grant offered no resistance, but demanded to be led with his accuser before a magistrate. Almost as the words were uttered, a cry was raised that the Lord Mayor and the Sheriffs were coming along Eastcheap, and the prisoner and Leonard were immediately hurried off in that direction. They met the civic authorities at the corner of Saint Clement's Lane; but instead of paying any attention to them, the Lord Mayor, who appeared to be in a state of great agitation and excitement, ordered the javelin-men, by whom he was attended, to push the mob aside.

"I will not delay your worship an instant," cried Leonard — "but this dreadful fire is the work of incendiaries, of whom that man," pointing to Grant, "is the principal. I pray your worship to question him. He may have important revelations to make."

"Eh, what?" cried the Lord Mayor, addressing Grant. "Is it true you are an incendiary? Who are your accomplices? Where are they?"

"I have none," replied Grant, boldly, — "I deny the charge altogether. Let my accuser prove it if he can."

"You hear what he says, young man," said the Mayor. "Did you see him set fire to any house? Did you find any fireballs on his person?"

"I did not," replied Leonard.

"*I* searched him your worship," cried Chowles, who was among the bystanders, "the moment he was seized, and found nothing upon him. It is a false and malicious charge."

"It looks like it, I must say," replied the Mayor. "On what grounds do you accuse him?" he added, angrily, to Leonard.

"On these," replied Leonard. "He came to me three hours ago, and confessed that he had a desperate design against the safety of the city, and made certain proposals to me, to which I would not listen. This is not the season for a full explanation of the matter. But I pray your worship, as you value the welfare of the city, to have him secured."

"There can be no harm in that," replied the Lord Mayor. "His appearance is decidedly against him. Let him be taken care of till the morrow, when I will examine further into the matter. Your name and place of abode, young man?"

"I am called Leonard Holt, and my business is that of a grocer, in Wood Street," was the reply.

"Enough," rejoined the Mayor. "Take away the prisoner. I will hear nothing further now. Lord! Lord! how the fire rages, to be sure. We shall have the whole city burnt down, if we do not take care."

"That we shall indeed," replied Sir Robert Vyner, one of the sheriffs, "unless the most prompt and decisive measures are immediately adopted."

"What would you recommend?" cried the Lord Mayor, despairingly.

Sir Robert looked perplexed by the question.

"If I might offer an opinion," interposed Leonard, "I would advise your worship to pull down all the houses in the way of the fire, as the only means of checking it."

"Pull down the houses!" cried the Lord Mayor. "Who ever heard of such an idea? Why, that would be worse than the fire. No, no; that will never do."

"The young man is in the right," observed Sir Joseph Sheldon, the other sheriff.

"Well, well—we shall see," replied the Mayor. "But we are losing time here. Forward! forward!"

And while Grant was borne off to Newgate by a guard of javelin-men, the Lord Mayor and his company proceeded to Fish Street Hill, where the whole conflagration burst upon them. The

moment the Lord Mayor appeared, he was beset on all sides by hundreds of families, soliciting his protection. Others came to give him the alarming intelligence that a very scanty supply of water only could be obtained, and that already two engines had been destroyed, while the firemen who worked them had narrowly escaped with life. Others again pressed him for instructions how to act, — some suggesting one plan, — some another, — and being of a weak and irresolute character, and utterly unequal to a fearful emergency like the present, he was completely bewildered. Bidding the houseless families take refuge in the churches, he ordered certain officers to attend them, and affecting to doubt the statement of those who affirmed there was no water, advised them to go to the river, where they would find plenty. In vain they assured him the tide was out, the Thames Water Tower empty, the pipes and conduits dry. He would not believe anything of the sort, but, upbraiding his informants with neglect, bade them try again. As to instructions, he could give none.

At last, a reluctant assent being wrung from him by Sir Joseph Sheldon that a house should be pulled down, as suggested by Leonard, preparations were instantly made for putting the design in execution. The house selected was about four doors from the top of Fish Street Hill, and belonged to a bird-cage-maker. But they encountered an unexpected

opposition. Having ascertained their purpose, the owner fastened his doors, and refused to admit them. He harangued the mob from one of the upper windows, and producing a pistol, threatened to fire upon them if they attempted to gain a forcible entrance. The officers, however, having received their orders, were not to be intimidated, and commenced breaking down the door. The birdcage-maker then fired, but without effect; and before he had time to reload, the door had yielded to the combined efforts of the multitude, who were greatly enraged at his strange conduct. They rushed up stairs, but finding he had locked himself in the room, left him there, supposing him secure, and commenced the work of demolition. More than a hundred men were engaged in the task, but, though they used the utmost exertion, they had little more than unroofed the building, when a cry was raised by those in the street that the house was on fire. Alarmed by the shout they descended, and found the report true. Flames were issuing from the room lately occupied by the birdcage-maker. The wretch had set fire to his dwelling, and then made his escape with his family by a back staircase. Thus defeated, the workmen, with bitter imprecations on the fugitive, withdrew, and Leonard, who had lent his best assistance to the task, repaired to the Lord Mayor. He found him in greater consternation than ever.

"We must go further off if we would do any

good," said Leonard; "and as the present plan is evidently too slow, we must have recourse to gunpowder."

"Gunpowder!" exclaimed the Lord Mayor. "Would you blow up the city, like a second Guy Fawkes? I begin to suspect you are one of the incendiaries yourself, young man. Lord, Lord! what will become of us!"

"If your worship disapproves of my suggestion, at least give orders what is to be done," rejoined Leonard.

"I have done all I can," replied the Mayor. "Who are you that talk to me thus?"

"I have told your worship I am a simple tradesman," replied Leonard. "But I have the welfare of the city at heart, and I cannot stand by and see it burnt to the ground without an effort to save it."

"Well, well, I dare say you mean very well, young man," rejoined the Lord Mayor, somewhat pacified. "But don't you perceive it 's impossible to stop such a fire as this without water, or engines. I 'm sure I would willingly lay down my life to preserve the city. But what can I do — what can any man do?"

"Much may be done if there is resolution to attempt it," returned Leonard. "I would recommend your worship to proceed, in the first place, to the wharfs on the banks of the Thames, and cause the removal of the wood, coal, and other combustible matter with which they are crowded."

"Well thought of," cried the Lord Mayor. "I will go thither at once. Do you stay here. Your advice will be useful. I will examine you touching the incendiary to-morrow—that is, if we are any of us left alive, which I don't expect. Lord, Lord! what will become of us."

And with many similar ejaculations, he hurried off with the sheriffs, and the greater part of his attendants, and taking his way down Saint Martin's Lane, soon reached the river side.

By this time, the fire had approached the summit of Fish Street Hill, and here the overhanging stories of the houses coming so close together as almost to meet at the top, the flames speedily caught the other side, and spread the conflagration in that direction. Two other houses were likewise discovered to be on fire in Crooked Lane, and in an incredibly short space the whole dense mass of habitations, lying at the west side of Fish Street Hill, and between Crooked Lane and East Cheap, were in flames, and threatening the venerable church of Saint Michael, which stood in the midst of them, with instant destruction. To the astonishment of all who witnessed it, the conflagration seemed to proceed as rapidly against the wind as with it, and to be approaching Thames Street, both by Pudding Lane and Saint Michael's Lane. A large stable, filled with straw and hay, at the back of the Star Inn, in Little Eastcheap, caught fire, and carrying the conflagration eastward, had already conveyed it as far as Botolph Lane.

It chanced that a poor Catholic priest, travelling from Douay to England, had landed that night, and taken up his quarters at the hotel, above mentioned. The landlord, who had been roused by the cries of fire, and alarmed by the rumours of incendiaries, immediately called to mind this guest, and dragging him from his room, thrust him, half naked, into the street. Announcing his conviction that the poor priest was an incendiary, to the mob without, they seized him, and in spite of his protestations and explanations, which being uttered in a foreign tongue, they could not comprehend, they were about to exercise summary punishment upon him, by hanging him to the sign-post before the landlord's door, when they were diverted from their dreadful purpose by Solomon Eagle, who prevailed upon them to carry him to Newgate.

The conflagration had now assumed so terrific a character, that it appalled even the stoutest spectator. It has been mentioned that for many weeks previous to the direful calamity, the weather had been remarkably dry and warm, a circumstance which had prepared the old wooden houses, abounding in this part of the city, for almost instantaneous ignition. Added to this, if the incendiaries themselves had deposited combustible materials at certain spots to extend the conflagration, they could not have selected better places than accident had arranged. All sorts of inflammable

goods were contained in the shops and warehouses, —oil, hemp, flax, pitch, tar, cordage, sugar, wine, and spirits; and when any magazine of this sort caught fire it spread the conflagration with tenfold rapidity.

The heat of the flames had now become almost insufferable, and the sparks and flakes of fire fell so fast and thick that the spectators were compelled to retreat to a considerable distance from the burning buildings. The noise occasioned by the cracking of the timbers, and the falling of walls and roofs, was awful in the extreme. All the avenues and thoroughfares near the fire were now choked up by carts, coaches, and other vehicles, which had been hastily brought thither to remove the goods of the inhabitants, and the hurry of the poor people to save a wreck of their property, and the attempts made by the gangs of plunderers to deprive them of it, constituted a scene of unparalleled tumult and confusion. As yet, no troops had appeared to maintain order, and seeing that as much mischief was almost done by the plunderers as by the fire, Leonard determined to go in search of the Lord Mayor, and acquaint him with the mischief that was occurring. Having heard that the fire had already reached London Bridge, he resolved to ascertain whether the report was true. As he proceeded down Saint Michael's Lane, he found the venerable church from which it was designated, on fire, and

with some difficulty forcing his way through the crowd, reached Thames Street, where he discovered that the conflagration had even made more fearful progress than he had anticipated. Fishmongers' Hall, a large square structure, was on fire, and burning swiftly, — the flames encircling its high roof, and the turret by which it was surmounted. Streams of fire, too, had darted down the numerous narrow alleys leading to the river-side, and reaching the wharfs, had kindled the heaps of wood and coal with which they were filled. The party under the command of the Lord Mayor had used their utmost exertions to get rid of these combustible materials by flinging them into the Thames; but they came too late, and were driven away by the approach of the fire. Most of the barges and heavy craft were aground, and they, too, caught fire, and were burned, with their contents.

Finding he could neither render any assistance, nor obtain speech with the Lord Mayor, and anxious to behold the terrible, yet sublime spectacle from the river, Leonard hastened to Old Swan Stairs, and springing into a boat, ordered the waterman to row into the middle of the Thames. He could then discern the full extent of the conflagration, and trace the progress it was making. All the houses between Fishmongers' Hall and the bridge were on fire, and behind them rose a vast sheet of flame. Saint Magnus' Church, at the foot of the bridge, was next seized by the

flame, and Leonard watched its destruction. An ancient gateway followed, and soon afterwards a large stack of houses erected upon the bridge, burst into flames.

The inhabitants of the houses on the bridge, having now become thoroughly alarmed, flung bedding, boxes, and articles of furniture, out of their windows into the river. A crowd of boats surrounded the starlings, and the terrified occupants of the structures above descending to them by the staircases in the interior of the piers, embarked with every article they could carry off. The river presented a most extraordinary scene. Lighted by the red and fierce reflection of the fire, and covered with boats, filled with families who had just quitted their habitations either on the bridge or in some other street adjoining it, its whole surface was speckled with pieces of furniture, or goods that had been cast into it, and which were now floating up with the tide. Great crowds were collected on the Southwark shore to watch the conflagration, while on the opposite side the wharfs and quays were thronged with persons removing their goods, and embarking them in boats. One circumstance, noted by Pepys, and which also struck Leonard, was the singular attachment displayed by the pigeons, kept by the owners of several houses on the bridge, to the spots they had been accustomed to. Even when the flames attacked the buildings to which the dovecots were attached,

the birds wheeled round and round them, until their pinions being scorched by the fire, they dropped into the water.

Leonard remained on the river nearly two hours. He could not, in fact, tear himself away from the spectacle, which possessed a strange fascination in his eyes. He began to think that all the efforts of men were unavailing to arrest the progress of destruction, and he was for awhile content to regard it as a mere spectacle. And never had he beheld a more impressive—a more terrible sight. There lay the vast and populous city before him, which he had once before known to be invaded by an invisible, but exterminating foe, now attacked by a furious and far seen enemy. The fire seemed to form a vast arch — many-coloured as a rainbow,—reflected in the sky, and re-reflected in all its horrible splendour in the river.

Nor was the aspect of the city less striking. The innumerable towers and spires of the churches rose tall and dark through the wavering sheet of flame, and every now and then one of them would topple down and disappear, as if swallowed up by the devouring element. For a short space, the fire seemed to observe a regular, progressive movement, but when it fell upon better material, it reared its blazing crest aloft, changed its hues, and burnt with redoubled intensity. Leonard watched it thread narrow alleys, and firing every lesser habitation in its course, kindle some great hall or other

structure, whose remoteness seemed to secure it from immediate danger. At this distance, the roaring of the flames resembled that of a thousand furnaces. Ever and anon, it was broken by a sound like thunder, occasioned by the fall of some mighty edifice. Then there would come a quick succession of reports like the discharge of artillery, followed by a shower of fiery flakes and sparks blown aloft, like the explosion of some stupendous firework. Mixed with the roaring of the flames, the thunder of falling roofs, the cracking of timber, was a wild hubbub of human voices, that sounded afar off like a dismal wail. In spite of its terror, the appearance of the fire was at that time beautiful beyond description. Its varying colours — its fanciful forms—now shooting out in a hundred different directions, like lightning flashes,—now drawing itself up, as it were, and soaring aloft,—now splitting into a million tongues of flame, — these aspects so riveted the attention of Leonard that he almost forgot in the sight the dreadful devastation going forward. His eyes ached with gazing at the fiery spectacle, and he was glad to rest them on the black masses of building that stood in stern relief against it, and which there could be little doubt would soon become its prey.

It was now broad daylight, except for the mighty cloud of smoke which o'er-canopied the city, creating an artificial gloom. Leonard's troubled gaze wandered from the scene of destruction

to Saint Paul's,—an edifice which, from the many events connected with his fortunes that had occurred there, had always a singular interest in his eyes. Calling to mind the denunciations poured forth by Solomon Eagle against this fane, he could not help fearing they would now be fulfilled. What added to his misgivings was, that it was now almost entirely surrounded by poles and scaffolding. Ever since the cessation of the plague, the repairs, suspended during that awful season, had been recommenced under the superintendence of Doctor Christopher Wren, and were now proceeding with renewed activity. The whole of the building was under repair, and a vast number of masons were employed upon it, and it was their scaffoldings that impressed Leonard with a dread of what afterwards actually occurred. Accustomed to connect the figure of Solomon Eagle with the sacred structure, he could not help fancying that he discovered a speck resembling a human figure on the central tower. If it were the enthusiast, what must his feelings be at finding his prediction so fatally fulfilled? Little did Leonard think how the prophecy had been accomplished!

But his attention was speedily recalled to the progress of the conflagration. From the increased tumult in the city, it was evident the inhabitants were now thoroughly roused, and actively bestirring themselves to save their property. This was apparent, even on the river, from the multitude of

boats, deeply laden with goods of all kinds, which were now seen shaping their course towards Westminster. The fire, also, had made rapid progress on all sides. The vast pile of habitations at the north side of the bridge was now entirely in flames. The effect of this was awfully fine. Not only did the flames mount to a greater height, and appear singularly conspicuous from the situation of the houses, but every instant some blazing fragment fell with a tremendous splash into the water, where it hissed for a moment and then was for ever quenched, floating a black mass upon the surface. From the foot of the bridge to Coal Harbour Stairs, extended what Dryden finely calls "a quay of fire." All the wharfs and warehouses were in flames, and burning with astonishing rapidity, while this part of Thames Street, "the lodge of all combustibles," had likewise become a prey to the devouring element. The fire, too, had spread in an easterly direction, and consuming three churches, namely, Saint Andrew's, in Botolph Lane, Saint Mary's, in Love Lane, and Saint Dunstan's in the East, had invaded Tower Street, and seemed fast approaching the ancient fortress.

So fascinated was Leonard by the sight that he could have been well content to remain all day gazing at it, but he now reflected that he had other duties to perform, and directing the waterman to land him at Queenhithe, ascended Bread Street Hill, and betook himself to Wood Street.

CHAPTER IV.

LEONARD'S INTERVIEW WITH THE KING.

Some rumours of the conflagration, as will be supposed, had ere this reached Mr. Bloundel, but he had no idea of the extent of the direful calamity, and when informed of it by Leonard, lifted up his hands despairingly, exclaiming in accents of the deepest affliction—"Another judgment, then, has fallen upon this sinful city,—another judgment yet more terrible than the first. Man may have kindled this great fire, but the hand of God is apparent in it. 'Alas! alas! for thee, thou great city, Babylon! Alas for thee, thou mighty city! for in one hour is thy judgment come. The kings of the earth shall bewail thee, and lament for thee, when they see the smoke of thy burning.'"

"Your dwelling was spared in the last visitation, sir," observed Leonard, after a pause, "and you were able to shut yourself up, as in a strong castle, against the all-exterminating foe. But I fear you will not be able to ward off the assaults of the present enemy, and recommend you to re-

move your family and goods without delay to some place of security far from this doomed city."

"This is the Lord's day, Leonard, and must be kept holy," replied the grocer. "To-morrow, if I am spared so long, I will endeavour to find some place of shelter."

"If the conflagration continues to spread as rapidly as it is now doing, to-morrow will be too late," rejoined Leonard.

"It may be so," returned the grocer, "but I will not violate the Sabbath. If the safety of my family is threatened, that is another matter, but I will not attempt to preserve my goods. Do not, however, let me influence you. Take such portion of our stock as belongs to you, and you know that a third of the whole is yours, and convey it where you please."

"On no account, sir," interrupted Leonard. "I should never think of acting in opposition to your wishes. This will be a sad Sunday for London."

"The saddest she has ever seen," replied the grocer; "for though the voice of prayer was silenced in her churches during the awful season of the plague, yet then men's minds had been gradually prepared for the calamity, and though filled with terror, they were not taken by surprise, as must now be the case. But let us to prayers, and may our earnest supplications avail in turning aside the Divine displeasure."

And summoning his family and household, all of whom were by this time stirring, and in the utmost consternation at what they had heard of the fire, he commenced a prayer adapted to the occasion in a strain of the utmost fervour; and as Leonard gazed at his austere countenance, now lighted up with holy zeal, and listened to his earnest intercessions in behalf of the devoted city, he was reminded of the prophet Jeremiah weeping for Jerusalem before the throne of grace.

Prayers over, the whole party sat down to their morning repast, after which, the grocer and his eldest son, accompanied by Leonard and Blaize, mounted to the roof of the house, and gazing in the direction of the conflagration, they could plainly distinguish the vast cloud of yellow smoke commingled with flame, that marked the scene of its ravages. As the wind blew from this quarter, charged, as has been stated, with a cloud of sparks, many of the fire-drops were dashed in their faces, and compelled them to shade their eyes. The same awful roar which Leonard had heard on the river, likewise broke upon their ears, while from all the adjoining streets arose a wild clamour of human voices, the burden of whose cries was "Fire! Fire!" The church bells, which should have been tolling to early devotion, were now loudly ringing the alarm, while their towers were crowded, as were the roofs of most of the houses, with persons gazing towards the scene of devasta-

tion. Nothing could be more opposite to the stillness and quiet of a Sabbath morn, and as the grocer listened to the noise and tumult prevailing around him, he could not repress a groan.

"I never thought my ears would be so much offended on this day," he said. "Let us go down. I have seen, and heard enough."

They then descended, and Stephen Bloundel, who was greatly alarmed by what he had just witnessed, strongly urged his father to remove immediately.

"There are seasons," said the young man, "when even our duty to Heaven becomes a secondary consideration, and I should be sorry if the fruit of your industry were sacrificed to your religious scruples."

"There are no such seasons," replied the grocer, severely, "and I grieve that a son of mine should think so. If the inhabitants of this sinful city had not broken the Sabbath, and neglected God's commandments, this heavy judgment would not have fallen upon them. I shall neglect no precaution for the personal safety of my family, but I place my worldly goods in the hands of Him from whom I derived them, and to whom I am ready to restore them, whenever it shall please Him to take them."

"I am rebuked, father," replied Stephen, humbly; "and entreat your pardon for having ventured to differ with you. I am now fully sensible of the propriety of your conduct."

"And I have ever acquiesced in your wishes, be what they may," said Mrs. Bloundel to her husband, "but I confess I am dreadfully frightened. I hope you will remove the first thing to-morrow."

"When midnight has struck, and the Sabbath is past, I shall commence my preparations," replied the grocer. "You must rest content till then."

Mrs. Bloundel heaved a sigh, but said no more, and the grocer, retiring to a side table, opened the Bible, and sat down calmly to its perusal. But though no further remonstrances reached his ears, there was great murmuring in the kitchen on the part of Blaize and Patience.

"Goodness knows what will become of us!" ried the latter. "I expect we shall all be burnt live, owing to our master's obstinacy. What harm can there be in moving on a Sunday, I should like to know? I'm sure I'm too much hurried and flurried to say my prayers as I ought to do."

"And so am I," replied Blaize. "Mr Bloundel is a great deal too particular. What a dreadful thing it would be if the house should be burnt down, and all my mother's savings, which were to form a provision for our marriage, lost."

"That would be terrible, indeed," cried Patience, with a look of dismay. "I think the wedding had better take place as soon as the fire is

over. It can't last many days if it goes on at this rate."

"You are right," returned Blaize. "I have no objection. I 'll speak to my mother at once." And stepping into the scullery, where old Josyna was washing some dishes, he addressed her — "Mother, I 'm sadly afraid this great fire will reach us before our master will allow us to move. Hadn't you better let me take care of the money you intended giving me on my marriage with Patience."

"No, no, myn goed zoon," replied Josyna, shaking her head — "I musd zee you married virsd."

"But I can't be married to-day," cried Blaize — "and there 's no time to lose. The fire will be upon us directly."

"I cand help dat," returned his mother. "We musd place our drusd in God."

"There I quite agree with you, mother," replied Blaize — "but we must also take care of ourselves. If you won't give me the money, at least put it in a box to carry off at a moment's notice."

"Don't be afraid, myn zoon," replied Josyna. "I won'd forged id."

"I 'm sadly afraid you will though," muttered Blaize, as he walked away. "There 's no doing any good with her," he added to Patience. "She 's as obstinate as Mr. Bloundel. I should like to see

the fire of all things, but I suppose I mustn't leave the house."

"Of course not," replied Patience, pettishly; "at such a time, it would be highly improper. *I* forbid that."

"Then I must needs submit," groaned Blaize,— "I can't even have my own way before marriage."

When the proper time arrived, the grocer, accompanied by all his family and household, except old Josyna, who was left in charge of the house, repaired to the neighbouring church of Saint Alban's, but finding the doors closed, and that no service was to be performed, he returned home with a sorrowful heart.

Soon after this, Leonard took Mr. Bloundel apart, and observed to him, "I have a strong conviction that I could be useful in arresting the progress of the conflagration, and as I cannot attend church service, I will, with your permission, devote myself to that object. It is my intention to proceed to Whitehall, and if possible, obtain an audience of the King, and if I succeed in doing so, to lay a plan before him, which I think would prove efficacious."

"I will not ask what the plan is," rejoined the grocer, "because I doubt its success. Neither will I oppose your design, which is praiseworthy. Go, and may it prosper. Return in the evening for I may need your assistance, — perhaps, protection."

Leonard then prepared to set forth. Blaize begged hard to accompany him, but was refused. Forcing his way through the host of carts, coaches, drays, and other vehicles thronging the streets, Leonard made the best of his way to Whitehall, where he speedily arrived. A large body of mounted troopers were stationed before the gates of the palace, and a regiment of the foot-guards were drawn up in the court. Drums were beating to arms, and other martial sounds were heard, showing the alarm that was felt. Leonard was stopped at the gate by a sentinel, and refused admittance, and he would in all probability have been turned back, if at that moment the Lords Argentine and Rochester had not come up. On seeing him, the former frowned, and passed quickly on, but the latter halted.

"You seem to be in some difficulty," remarked Rochester. "Can I help you?"

Leonard was about to turn away, but he checked himself.

"I will not suffer my resentful feelings to operate injuriously to others," he muttered. "I desire to see the King, my lord," he added, to the Earl. "I have a proposal to make to him, which I think would be a means of checking the conflagration."

"Say you so!" cried Rochester. "Come along then. Heaven grant your plan may prove suc-

cessful, in which case, I promise you, you shall be nobly rewarded."

"I seek no reward, my lord," replied Leonard. "All I desire is to save the city."

"Well, well," rejoined Rochester, "it will be time enough to refuse his Majesty's bounty when offered."

Upon this, he ordered the sentinel to withdraw, and Leonard followed him into the palace. They found the entrance-hall filled with groups of officers and attendants, all conversing together, it was evident from their looks and manner, on the one engrossing topic,—the conflagration.

Ascending a magnificent staircase, and traversing part of a grand gallery, they entered an ante-room, in which a number of courtiers and pages,—amongst the latter of whom was Chiffinch,—were assembled. At the door of the inner chamber stood a couple of ushers, and as the Earl approached, it was instantly thrown open. As Leonard, however, who followed close behind his leader, passed Chiffinch, the latter caught hold of his arm and detained him. Hearing the movement, Rochester turned, and said quickly to the page, "Let him pass, he is going with me."

"Old Rowley is in no humour for a jest to-day, my lord," replied Chiffinch, familiarly. "He is more serious than I have ever before seen him, and takes this terrible fire sadly to heart, as well he may. Mr. Secretary Pepys, of the Admiralty, is

with him, and is detailing all particulars of the calamity to him, I believe."

"It is in reference to the fire that I have brought this young man with me" returned the Earl. "Let him pass, I say. State your plan boldly," he added, as they entered the audience-chamber.

At the further end of the long apartment, on a chair of state, and beneath a canopy, sat Charles. He was evidently much disturbed, and looked eagerly at the new comers, especially at Leonard, expecting to find him the bearer of some important intelligence. On the right of the King, and near an open window, which, looking towards the river, commanded a view of the fire on the bridge, as well as of part of the burning city, stood the Duke of York. The Duke did not appear much concerned at the calamity, but was laughing with Lord Argentine, who stood close beside him. The smile fled from the lips of the latter as he beheld Leonard, and he looked angrily at Rochester, who did not, however, appear to notice his displeasure. On the left of the royal chair was Mr. Pepys, engaged, as Chiffinch had intimated, in detailing to the King the progress of the conflagration; and next to the secretary stood the Earl of Craven,—a handsome, commanding, and martial-looking personage, though somewhat stricken in years. Three other noblemen—namely, the Lords Hollis, Arlington, and Ashley,—were likewise present.

"Who have you with you, Rochester?" demanded Charles, as the Earl and his companion approached him.

"A young man, my liege, who desires to make known to you a plan for checking this conflagration," replied the Earl.

"Ah!" exclaimed the King. "Let him accomplish that for us, and he shall ask what he will in return."

"I ventured to promise him as much," observed Rochester.

"Mine is a very simple and very obvious plan, sire," said Leonard, "but I will engage, on the peril of my life, if you will give me sufficient authority, and means to work withal, to stop the further progress of this fire."

"In what way?" asked Charles, impatiently. "In what way?"

"By demolishing the houses around the conflagration with gunpowder, so as to form a wide gap between those left and the flames," replied Leonard.

"A short and summary process, truly," replied the King. "But it would occasion great waste of property, and might be attended with other serious consequences."

"Not half so much property will be destroyed as if the slower and seemingly-safer course of pulling down the houses is pursued," rejoined Leonard. "That experiment has been tried and failed."

"I am of the young man's opinion," observed the Earl of Craven.

"And I," added Pepys. "Better lose half the city than the whole. As it is, your Majesty is not safe in your palace."

"Why, you do not think it can reach Whitehall?" cried the King, rising and walking to the window. "How say you, brother?" he added, to the Duke of York—"shall we act upon this young man's suggestion, and order the wholesale demolition of the houses which he recommends?"

"I would not advise your Majesty to do so,—at least, not without consideration," answered the Duke. "This is a terrible fire no doubt, but the danger may be greatly exaggerated, and if any ill consequences should result from the proposed scheme, the blame will be entirely laid upon your Majesty."

"I care not for that," replied the King, "provided I feel assured it is for the best."

"The plan would do incalculably more mischief than the fire itself," observed Lord Argentine, "and would be met by the most determined opposition on the part of the owners of the habitations condemned to destruction. Whole streets will have to be blown up, and your Majesty will easily comprehend the confusion and damage that will ensue."

"Lord Argentine has expressed my sentiments exactly," said the Duke of York.

"There is nothing for it, then, but for your Majesty to call for a fiddle, and amuse yourself, like Nero, while your city is burning," remarked Rochester, sarcastically.

"Another such jest, my lord," rejoined the King, sternly, "and it shall cost you your liberty. I will go upon the river instantly, and view the fire myself, and then decide what course shall be adopted."

"There are rumours that incendiaries are abroad, your Majesty," remarked Argentine, glancing maliciously at Leonard, — "and it is not unlikely that he who lighted the fire should know how to extinguish it."

"His lordship says truly," rejoined Leonard. "There *are* incendiaries abroad, and the chief of them was taken by my hand, and lodged in Newgate, where he lies for examination."

"Ha!" exclaimed the King, eagerly. "Did you catch the miscreant in the fact?"

"No, my liege," replied Leonard; "but he came to me a few hours before the outbreak of the fire, intimating that he was in possession of a plot against the city, — a design so monstrous, that your Majesty would give any reward to the discloser of it. He proposed to reveal this plot to me on certain terms."

"And you accepted them?" cried the King.

"No, my liege," replied Leonard. "I refused them, and would have secured him, but he

escaped me at that time. I afterwards discovered him among the spectators, near the fire, and caused his arrest."

"And who is this villain?" cried the King.

"I must refer your Majesty to Lord Argentine," replied Leonard.

"Do you know anything of the transaction, my lord?" said Charles, appealing to him.

"Not I, your Majesty," said Argentine, vainly endeavouring to conceal his anger and confusion. "The knave has spoken falsely."

"He shall rue it, if he has done so," rejoined the Monarch. "What has the man you speak of to do with Lord Argentine?" he added, to Leonard.

"He is his father," was the reply.

Charles looked at Lord Argentine, and became convinced from the altered expression of his countenance, that the truth had been spoken. He, therefore, arose, and motioning him to follow him, led him into the recess of a window, where they remained in conversation for some minutes. While this was passing, the Earl of Rochester observed, in an under-tone, to Leonard, "You have made a mortal foe of Lord Argentine, but I will protect you."

"I require no other protection than I can afford myself, my lord," rejoined Leonard, coldly.

Shortly after this, Charles stepped forward with a graver aspect than before, and said, "Before proceeding to view this conflagration, I must give

some directions in reference to it. To you, my Lord Craven, whose intrepidity I well know, I intrust the most important post. You will station yourself at the east of the conflagration, and if you find it making its way to the Tower, as I hear is the case, check it at all hazards. The old fortress must be preserved at any risk. But do not resort to gunpowder unless you receive an order from me accompanied by my signet ring. My Lords Hollis and Ashley, you will have the care of the north-west of the city. Station yourselves near Newgate Market. Rochester and Arlington, your posts will be at Saint Paul's. Watch over the august cathedral. I would not have it injured for half my kingdom. Brother," he added to the Duke of York, "you will accompany me in my barge,—and you, Mr. Pepys. You, young man," to Leonard, "can follow in my train."

"Has your Majesty no post for me?" asked Argentine.

"No," replied Charles, turning coldly from him.

"Had not your Majesty better let him have the custody of your gaol of Newgate?" remarked Rochester, sarcastically; "he has an interest in its safe keeping."

Lord Argentine turned deadly pale, but he made no answer.

Attended by the Duke of York and Mr. Pepys, and followed at a respectful distance by Leonard, the King then passed through the ante-room, and,

descending the grand staircase, traversed a variety of passages, until he reached the private stairs communicating with the river. At the foot lay the royal barge, in which he embarked with his train.

Charles appeared greatly moved by the sight of the thousands of his houseless subjects, whom he encountered in his passage down the Thames, and whenever a feeble shout was raised for him, he returned it with a blessing. When nearly opposite Queenhithe, he commanded the rowers to pause. The conflagration had made formidable progress since Leonard beheld it a few hours back, and had advanced nearly as far as the Still-yard on the river side, while it was burning upwards through thick ranks of houses, almost as far as Cannon Street. The roaring of the flames was louder than ever—and the crash of falling habitations, and the tumult and cries of the affrighted populace yet more terrific.

Charles gazed at the appalling spectacle like one who could not believe his senses, and it was some time before the overwhelming truth could force itself upon him. Tears then started to his eyes, and uttering an ejaculation of despair, he commanded the rowers to make instantly for the shore.

CHAPTER V.

HOW LEONARD SAVED THE KING'S LIFE.

The royal barge landed at Queenhithe, and Charles instantly disembarking, proceeded on foot, and at a pace that compelled his attendants to move quickly to keep up with him, to Thames Street. Here, however, the confusion was so great, owing to the rush of people, and the number of vehicles employed in the removal of goods, that he was obliged to come to a halt. Fortunately, at this moment, a company of the train-bands rode up, and their leader dismounting, offered his horse to the King, who instantly sprang into the saddle, and scarcely waiting till the Duke of York could be similarly accommodated, forced his way through the crowd as far as Brewer Lane, where his progress was stopped by the intense heat. At little more than a hundred yards from this point the whole street was on fire, and the flames bursting from the windows and roofs of the houses, with a roar like that which might be supposed to be produced by the forges of the Cyclops, united in a vast blazing

arch overhead. It chanced, too, that in some places cellars filled with combustible materials extended under the street, and here the ground would crack and jets of fire shoot forth like the eruption of a volcano. The walls and timbers of the houses at some distance from the conflagration were scorched and blistered with the heat, and completely prepared for ignition. Overhead being a vast and momentarily increasing cloud of flame-coloured smoke, which spread all over the city, filling it as with a thick mist, while the glowing vault above looked, as Evelyn expresses it, "like the top of a burning oven."

Two churches, namely, Allhallows the Great, and Allhallows the Less, were burnt down in the King's sight, and the lofty spire of a third, Saint Lawrence Poulteney, had just caught fire, and looked like a flame-tipped spear. After contemplating this spectacle for some time, Charles roused himself from the state of stupefaction into which he was thrown, and determined, if possible, to arrest the further progress of the devouring element along the river side, commanded all the houses on the west of Dowgate Dock to be instantly demolished. A large body of men were, therefore, set upon this difficult and dangerous, and, as it proved, futile task. Another party were ordered to the same duty on Dowgate Hill, and the crash of tumbling walls and beams was soon added to the general uproar, while clouds

of dust, darkened the air. It was with some difficulty that a sufficient space could be kept clear for carrying these operations into effect; and long before they were half completed, Charles had the mortification of finding the fire gaining ground so rapidly that they must prove ineffectual. Word was brought at this juncture that a fresh fire had broken out in Elbow Lane, and while the monarch was listening to this dreary intelligence, a fearful cry was heard near the river, followed, the next moment, by a tumultuous rush of persons from that quarter. The fire, as if in scorn, had leapt across Dowgate Dock, and seizing upon the half demolished houses, instantly made them its prey. The rapidity with which the conflagration proceeded was astounding, and completely baffled all attempts to check it. The wind continued blowing as furiously as ever, nor was there the slightest prospect of its abatement. All the King's better qualities were called into play by the present terrible crisis. With a courage and devotion that he seldom displayed, he exposed himself to the greatest risk, personally assisting at all the operations he commanded; while humane attention to the sufferers by the calamity almost reconciled them to their deplorable situation. His movements were almost as rapid as those of the fire itself. Riding up Cannon Street, and from thence by Sweeting's Lane to Lombard Street, and so on by Fenchurch Street, to Tower Street,

he issued directions all the way, checking every disturbance, and causing a band of depredators, who had broken into the house of a wealthy goldsmith, to be carried off to Newgate. Arrived in Tower Street, he found the Earl of Craven and his party stationed a little beyond Saint Dunstan's in the East.

All immediate apprehensions in this quarter appeared at an end. The church had been destroyed, as before mentioned, but several houses in its vicinity having been demolished, the fire had not extended eastward. Satisfied that the Tower was in no immediate danger, the King retraced his course, and encountering the Lord Mayor in Lombard Street, sharply reproved him for his want of zeal and discretion.

"I do not deserve your Majesty's reproaches," replied the Lord Mayor. "Ever since the fire broke out I have not rested an instant, and am almost worn to death with anxiety and fatigue. I am just returned from Guildhall, where a vast quantity of plate belonging to the city companies has been deposited. Lord! lord! what a fire this is!"

"You are chiefly to blame for its getting so much ahead," replied the King, angrily. "Had you adopted vigorous measures at the outset, it might have easily been got under. I hear no water was to be obtained. How was that?"

"It is a damnable plot, your Majesty, designed

by the Papists, or the Dutch, or the French,—I don't know which—perhaps all three," rejoined the Lord Mayor; "and it appears that the cocks of all the pipes at the waterworks at Islington were turned, while the pipes and conduits in the city were empty. This is no accidental fire, your Majesty."

"So I find," replied the King; "but it will be time enough to inquire into its origin hereafter. Meantime we must act, and energetically, or we shall be equally as much to blame as the incendiaries. Let a proclamation be made, enjoining all those persons who have been driven from their homes by the fire to proceed with such effects as they have preserved to Moorfields, where their wants shall be cared for."

"It shall be made instantly, your Majesty," replied the Lord Mayor.

"Your next business will be to see to the removal of all the wealth from the goldsmiths' houses in this street, and in Gracechurch Street, to some places of security, — Guildhall, or the Royal Exchange, for instance," continued the King.

"Your Majesty's directions shall be implicitly obeyed," replied the Lord Mayor.

"You will then pull down all the houses to the east of the fire," pursued the King. "Get all the men you can muster—and never relax your exertions till you have made a wide and clear breach between the flames and their prey."

"I will—I will, your Majesty," groaned the Lord Mayor.

"About it, then," rejoined the King. And striking spurs into his horse, he rode off with his train.

He now penetrated one of the narrow alleys leading to the Three Cranes in the Vintry, where he ascended to the roof of the habitation that he might view the fire. He saw that it was making such rapid advances towards him that it must very soon reach the building on which he stood, and, half-suffocated with the smoke and scorched with the fire-drops, he descended.

Not long after this, Waterman's Hall was discovered to be on fire, and stirred by the sight, Charles made fresh efforts to check the progress of the conflagration, by demolishing more houses. So eagerly did he occupy himself in the task, that his life had well-nigh fallen a sacrifice to his zeal. He was standing below a building which the workmen were unroofing, when all at once the whole of the upper part of the wall gave way, dragging several heavy beams with it, and would have infallibly crushed him, if Leonard, who was stationed behind him, had not noticed the circumstance, and rushing forward with the greatest promptitude, dragged him out of harm's way. An engineer, with whom the King was conversing at the time of the accident, was buried in the ruins, and when taken out was found fearfully mutilated,

and quite dead. Both Charles and his preserver were covered with dust and rubbish, and Leonard received a severe blow on the shoulder from a falling brick.

On recovering from the shock which for some moments deprived him of the power of speech, Charles inquired for his deliverer, and on being shown him, said, with a look of surprise and pleasure, "What, is it you, young man? I am glad of it. Depend upon it, I shall not forget the important service you have rendered me."

"If he remembers it, it will be the first time he has ever so exercised his memory," observed Chiffinch in a loud whisper to Leonard. "I advise you as a friend not to let his gratitude cool."

Undeterred by his late narrow escape, Charles ordered fresh houses to be demolished, and stimulated the workmen to exertion by his personal superintendence of their operations. He commanded Leonard to keep constantly near him, laughingly observing, "I shall feel safe while you are by. You have a better eye for a falling house than any of my attendants."

Worn out, at length, with fatigue, Charles proceeded with the Duke of York and his immediate attendants to Painter's Hall in Little Trinity Lane, in quest of refreshment, where a repast was hastily prepared for him, and he sat down to it with an appetite such as the most magnificent banquet could not, under other circumstances,

have provoked. His hunger satisfied, he dispatched messengers to command the immediate attendance of the Lord Mayor, the sheriffs, and aldermen, and when they arrived, he thus addressed them,—"My Lord Mayor and Gentlemen, it has been recommended to me by this young man," pointing to Leonard, "that the sole way of checking the further progress of this disastrous conflagration, which threatens the total destruction of our city, will be by blowing up the houses with gunpowder, so as to form a wide gap between the flames and the habitations yet remaining unseized. This plan will necessarily involve great destruction of property, and may, notwithstanding all the care that can be adopted, be attended with some loss of life, but I conceive it will be effectual. Before ordering it, however, to be put into execution, I desire to learn your opinion of it. How say you, my Lord Mayor and Gentlemen? Does the plan meet with your approbation?"

"I pray your Majesty to allow me to confer for a moment with my brethren," replied the Lord Mayor, cautiously, "before I return an answer. It is too serious a matter to decide upon at once."

"Be it so," replied the King.

And the civic authorities withdrew with the King. Leonard heard though he did not dare to remark upon it, that the Duke of York leaned

forward as the Lord Mayor passed him, and whispered in his ear, "Take heed what you do. He only desires to shift the responsibility of the act from his own shoulders to yours."

"If they assent," said the King to Leonard, "I will place you at the head of a party of engineers."

"I beseech your Majesty neither to regard me or them," replied Leonard. "Use the authority it has pleased Heaven to bestow upon you for the preservation of the city, and think and act for yourself, or you will assuredly regret your want of decision. It has been my fortune, with the assistance of God, to be the humble instrument of accomplishing your Majesty's deliverance from peril, and I have your royal word that you will not forget it."

"Nor will I," cried the King, hastily.

"Then suffer the petition I now make to you to prevail," cried Leonard, falling on his knees. "Be not influenced by the opinion of the Lord Mayor and his brethren, whose own interests may lead them to oppose the plan, but if you think well of it, instantly adopt it."

Charles looked irresolute, but might have yielded, if the Duke of York had not stepped forward.

"Your Majesty had better not act too precipitately," said the Duke. "Listen to the councils of your prudent advisers. A false step in such a case will be irretrievable."

"Nay, brother," rejoined the King, "I see no particular risk in it after all, and I incline towards the young man's opinion."

"At least hear what they have got to say," rejoined the Duke. "And here they come. They have not been long in deliberation."

"The result of it may be easily predicted," said Leonard, rising.

As Leonard had foreseen, the civic authorities were adverse to the plan. The Lord Mayor, in the name of himself and his brethren, earnestly solicited the King to postpone the execution of his order till all other means of checking the progress of the conflagration had been tried, and till such time, at least, as the property of the owners of the houses to be destroyed could be removed. He further added that it was the unanimous opinion of himself and his brethren that the plan was fraught with great peril to the safety of the citizens, and that they could not bring themselves to assent to it. If, therefore, his Majesty chose to adopt it they must leave the responsibility with him.

"I told your Majesty how it would be," observed the Duke of York, triumphantly.

"I am sorry to find you are right, brother," replied the King, frowning. We are overruled you see, friend," he added to Leonard.

"Your Majesty has signed the doom of your city," rejoined Leonard, mournfully.

"I trust not—I trust not," replied Charles, hastily, and with an uneasy shrug of the shoulder. "Fail not to remind me when all is over of the obligation I am under to you."

"Your Majesty has refused the sole boon I desired to have granted," rejoined Leonard.

"And do you not see the reason, friend?" returned the King. "These worthy and wealthy citizens desire to remove their property. Their arguments are unanswerable. I *must* give them time to do it. But we waste time here," he added, rising. "Remember," to Leonard, "my debt is not discharged. And I command you, on pain of my sovereign displeasure, not to omit to claim its payment."

"I will enter it in my memorandum-book, and will put your Majesty in mind of it at the fitting season," observed Chiffinch, who had taken a great fancy to Leonard.

The King smiled good-humouredly, and quitting the hall with his attendants proceeded to superintend the further demolition of houses. He next visited all the posts, saw that the different noblemen were at their appointed stations, and by his unremitting exertions contrived to restore something like order to the tumultuous streets. Thousands of men were now employed in different quarters in pulling down houses, and the most powerful engines of war were employed in the work. The confusion that attended these proceed-

ings is indescribable. The engineers and workmen wrought in clouds of dust and smoke, and the crash of falling timber and walls was deafening. In a short time, the upper part of Cornhill was rendered wholly impassable, owing to the heaps of rubbish, and directions were given to the engineers to proceed to the Poultry, and demolish the houses as far as the Conduit in Cheapside, by which means it was hoped that the Royal Exchange would be saved.

Meanwhile, all the wealthy goldsmiths and merchants in Lombard Street and Gracechurch Street had been actively employed in removing all their money, plate, and goods to places of security. A vast quantity was conveyed to Guildhall, as has been stated, and the rest to different churches and halls remote from the scene of conflagration. But in spite of all their caution much property was carried off by the depredators, and amongst others by Chowles and Judith, who contrived to secure a mass of plate, gold, and jewels, that satisfied even their rapacious souls.

While this was passing in the heart of the burning city, vast crowds were streaming out of its gates, and encamping themselves in pursuance of the royal injunction in Finsbury Fields, and Spital Fields. Others crossed the water to Southwark and took refuge in Saint George's Fields—and it was a sad and touching sight to see all these families collected, without shelter or food,

most of whom a few hours before were in possession of all the comforts of life, but were now reduced to the condition of beggars.

To return to the conflagration. While one party continued to labour incessantly at the work of demolition, and ineffectually sought to quench the flames, by bringing a few engines to play upon them, — a scanty supply of water having now been obtained,—the fire, disdaining such puny opposition, and determined to show its giant strength, leaped over all the breaches, drove the water-carriers back, compelled them to relinquish their buckets and to abandon their engines, which it made its prey, and seizing upon the heaps of timber and other fragments occasioned by the demolition, consumed them, and marched onwards with furious exultation.

It was now proceeding up Gracechurch Street, Saint Clement's Lane, Nicholas Lane, and Abchurch Lane at the same time, destroying all in its course. The whole of Lombard Street was choked up with the ruins and rubbish of demolished houses, through which thousands of persons were toiling to carry off goods, either for the purposes of assistance or of plunder. The King was at the west end of the street, near the church of Saint Mary Woolnoth, and the fearful havoc and destruction going forward drew tears from his eyes. A scene of greater confusion cannot be imagined. Leonard was in the midst of it, and, care-

less of his own safety, toiled amid the tumbling fragments of the houses to rescue some article of value for its unfortunate owner. While he was thus employed, he observed a man leap out of a window of a partly-demolished house, disclosing in the action that he had a casket concealed under his cloak.

A second glance showed him that this individual was Pillichody, and satisfied that he had been plundering the house, he instantly seized him. The bully struggled violently, but at last dropping the casket, made his escape, vowing to be revenged. Leonard laughed at his threats, and the next moment had the satisfaction of restoring the casket to its rightful owner, an old merchant who issued from the house, and who warmly thanking him, told him it contained jewels of immense value.

Not half an hour after this, the flames poured upon Lombard Street from the four avenues before-mentioned, and the whole neighbourhood was on fire. With inconceivable rapidity, they then ran up Birchin Lane, and reaching Cornhill, spread to the right and left in that great thoroughfare. The conflagration had now reached the highest point of the city, and presented the grandest and most terrific aspect it had yet assumed from the river. Thus viewed, it appeared, as Pepys describes it, "as an entire arch of fire from the Three Cranes to the other side of the bridge, and in a bow up the hill, for an arch of

above a mile long: *it made weep to see it.*" Vincent also likens its appearance at this juncture to that of a bow. "A dreadful bow it was," writes this eloquent non-conformist preacher, "such as mine eyes had never before seen; a bow which had God's arrow in it with a flaming point; a shining bow, not like that in the cloud which brings water with it, and withal signifieth God's covenant not to destroy the world any more with water, but a bow having fire in it, and signifying God's anger, and his intention to destroy London with fire."

As the day drew to a close, and it became darker, the spectacle increased in terror and sublimity. The tall black towers of the churches assumed ghastly forms, and to some eyes appeared like infernal spirits plunging in a lake of flame, while even to the most reckless the conflagration seemed to present a picture of the terrors of the Last Day.

Never before had such a night as that which ensued fallen upon London. None of its inhabitants thought of retiring to rest, or if they sought repose after the excessive fatigue they had undergone, it was only in such manner as would best enable them to rise and renew their exertions to check the flames, which were continued throughout the night, but wholly without success. The conflagration appeared to proceed at the same appalling rapidity. Halls, towers, churches, pub-

lic and private buildings were burning to the number of more than ten thousand, while clouds of smoke covered the vast expanse of more than fifty miles. Travellers approaching London from the north-east were enveloped in it ten miles off, and the fiery reflection in the sky could be discerned at an equal distance. The "hideous storm," as Evelyn terms the fearful and astounding noise produced by the roaring of the flames and the falling of the numerous fabrics, continued without intermission during the whole of this fatal night.

CHAPTER VI.

HOW THE GROCER'S HOUSE WAS BURNT.

It was full ten o'clock before Leonard could obtain permission to quit the King's party, and he immediately hurried to Wood Street. He had scarcely entered it, when the cry of "fire" smote his ears, and rushing forward in an agony of apprehension, he beheld Mr. Bloundel's dwelling in flames. A large crowd was collected before the burning habitation, keeping guard over a vast heap of goods and furniture that had been removed from it.

So much beloved was Mr. Bloundel, and in such high estimation was his character held, that all his neighbours, on learning that his house was on fire, flew to his assistance, and bestirred themselves so actively, that in an extraordinary short space of time they had emptied the house of every article of value, and placed it out of danger in the street. In vain the grocer urged them to desist: his entreaties were disregarded by his zealous friends, and when he told them they were profaning the Sabbath, they replied that the responsibility of

their conduct would rest entirely on themselves, and they hoped they might never have anything worse to answer for. In spite of his disapproval of what was done, the grocer could not but be sensibly touched by their devotion, and as to his wife, she said with tears in her eyes, that "it was almost worth while having a fire to prove what good friends they had."

It was at this juncture that Leonard arrived. Way was instantly made for him, and leaping over the piles of chests and goods that blocked up the thoroughfare, he flew to Mr. Bloundel, who was standing in front of his flaming habitation with as calm and unmoved an expression of countenance as if nothing was happening, and presently ascertained from him in what manner the fire had originated.

It appeared that while the whole of the family were assembled at prayers, in the room ordinarily used for that purpose, they were alarmed at supper by a strong smell of smoke, which seemed to arise from the lower part of the house, and that as soon as their devotions were ended, for Mr. Bloundel would not allow them to stir before, Stephen and Blaize had proceeded to ascertain the cause, and on going down to the kitchen, found a dense smoke issuing from the adjoining cellar, the door of which stood ajar. Hearing a noise in the yard, they darted up the back steps, communicating with the cellar, and discovered a

man trying to make his escape over the wall by a rope ladder. Stephen instantly seized him, and the man drawing a sword, tried to free himself from his captor. In the struggle, he dropped a pistol, which Blaize snatching up, discharged with fatal effect against the wretch, who on examination proved to be Pillichody.

Efforts were made to check the fire, but in vain. The villain had accomplished his diabolical purpose too well. Acquainted with the premises, and with the habits of the family, he had got into the yard by means of the rope ladder, and hiding himself till the servants were summoned to prayers, stole into the cellar, and placing a fire-ball amid a heap of fagots and coals, and near several large casks of oil and other inflammable matters, struck a light and set fire to it.

"I shall ever reproach myself that I was away when this calamity occurred," observed Leonard, as the grocer brought his relation to an end.

"Then you will do so without reason," replied Mr. Bloundel, "for you could have rendered no assistance, and you see my good neighbours have taken the matter entirely out of my hands."

"Whither do you intend removing, sir?" rejoined Leonard. "If I might suggest, I would advise you to go to Farmer Wingfield's, at Kensal Green."

"You have anticipated my intention," replied

the grocer: "but we must now obtain some vehicles to transport these goods thither."

"Be that my part," replied Leonard. And in a short space of time, he had procured half a dozen large carts, into which the whole of the goods were speedily packed, and a coach having been likewise fetched by Blaize, Mrs. Bloundel and the three younger children, together with old Josyna and Patience, were placed in it.

"I hope your mother has taken care of her money," whispered the latter to the porter, as he assisted her into the vehicle.

"Never mind whether she has or not," rejoined Blaize, in the same tone, "we shan't want it. I am now as rich as my master, — perhaps richer. On stripping that rascal Pillichody, I found a large bag of gold, besides several caskets of jewels, upon him, all of which I consider lawful spoil, as he fell by my hand."

"To be sure," rejoined Patience. "I dare say he did not come very honestly by the treasures, but you can't help that, you know."

Blaize made no reply, but pushing her into the coach, shut the door.

All being now in readiness, directions were given to the drivers of the carts whither to proceed, and they were put in motion. At this moment, the grocer's firmness deserted him. Gazing at the old habitation, which was now wrapped in a sheet of

flame, he cried, in a voice broken with emotion, "In that house I have dwelt nearly thirty years—in that house all my children were born—in that house I found a safe refuge from the devouring pestilence. It is hard to quit it thus."

Controlling his emotion, however, the next moment, he turned away. But his feelings were destined to another trial. His neighbours flocked round him to bid him farewell in tones of such sympathy and regard that his constancy again deserted him.

"Thank you, thank you," he cried, pressing in turn each hand that was offered him. "Your kindness will never be effaced from my memory. God bless you all, and may He watch over you and protect you!" And with these words, he broke from them.

So great was the crowd and confusion in Cheapside that nearly two hours elapsed before they reached Newgate; and indeed, if it had not been for the interference of the Earl of Rochester, they would not, in all probability, have got out of the city at all. The Earl was stationed near the Old 'Change, at the entrance to Saint Paul's churchyard, and learning their distress, ordered a party of the guard by whom he was attended to force a passage for them. Both Mr. Bloundel and Leonard would have declined this assistance if they had had the power of doing so, but there was no help in the present case.

They encountered no further difficulties, but were necessarily compelled to proceed at a slow pace, and did not reach Paddington for nearly two hours, being frequently stopped by persons, eagerly asking as to the progress of the fire. One circumstance struck the whole party as remarkable. Such was the tremendous glare of the conflagration that even at this distance the fire seemed close beside them, and if they had not known the contrary, they would have thought it could not be further off than Saint Giles's. The whole eastern sky in that direction seemed on fire, and glowed through the clouds of yellow smoke with which the air was filled with fearful splendour. After halting for a short time at the Wheat Sheaf, which they found open, — for, indeed, no house was closed that night, — to obtain some refreshment, and allay the intolerable thirst by which they were tormented, the party pursued their journey along the Harrow Road, and in due time approached Wingfield's residence.

The honest farmer, who with his wife and two of his men, was standing in a field at the top of the hill, gazing at the conflagration, hearing the noise occasioned by the carts, ran to the road side to see what was coming, and encountered Mr. Bloundel and Leonard, who had walked up the ascent a little more quickly than the others.

"I have been thinking of you," he said, after a cordial greeting had passed between them "and

wondering what would become of you in this dreadful fire. Nay, I had just told my dame I should go and look after you, and see whether I could be of any service to you. Well, I should be better pleased to see you in any way but this, though you could not be welcomer. I have room in the barn and outhouses for all you have brought, and hope and trust you have not lost much."

"I have lost nothing except the old house," replied the grocer, heaving a sigh.

"Another will soon be built," rejoined Wingfield, "and till that is done you shall not quit mine."

The coach having by this time arrived, Wingfield hastened towards it, and assisted its occupants to alight. Mrs. Bloundel was warmly welcomed by Dame Wingfield, and being taken with her children to the house, was truly happy to find herself under the shelter of its hospitable roof. The rest of the party, assisted by Wingfield and his men, exerting themselves to the utmost, the carts were speedily unloaded, and the goods deposited in the barns and outhouses. This done, the drivers were liberally rewarded for their trouble by Mr. Bloundel, and after draining several large jugs of ale brought them by the farmer, made the best of their way back, certain of obtaining further employment during the night.

Fatigued as he was, Leonard, before retiring to rest, could not help lingering on the brow of the hill to gaze at the burning city. The same effect

was observable here as at Paddington, and the conflagration appeared little more than a mile off. The whole heavens seemed on fire, and a distant roar was heard like the rush of a high wind through a mighty forest. Westminster Abbey and Saint Paul's could be distinctly seen in black relief against the sheet of flame, together with innumerable towers, spires, and other buildings, the whole constituting a picture unsurpassed for terrific grandeur since the world began, and only to be equalled by its final destruction.

Having gazed at the conflagration for some time, and fancied that he could even at this distance discern the fearful progress it made, Leonard retired to the barn, and throwing himself upon a heap of straw, instantly fell asleep. He was awakened the next morning by Farmer Wingfield, who came to tell him breakfast was ready, and having performed his ablutions, they adjourned to the house. Finding Mr. Bloundel comfortably established in his new quarters, Leonard proposed as soon as breakfast was over to proceed to town, and Wingfield volunteered to accompany him. Blaize, also, having placed his treasures, except a few pieces of gold, in the custody of Patience, begged to make one of the party, and his request being acceded to, the trio set out on foot, and gleaning fresh particulars of the fearful progress of the fire as they advanced, passed along Oxford Road, and crossing Holborn

Bridge, on the western side of which they were now demolishing the houses, mounted Snow Hill, and passed through the portal of Newgate.

Here they learnt that the whole of Wood Street was consumed, that the fire had spread eastward as far as Gutter Lane, and that Saint Michael's church, adjoining Wood Street, Goldsmith's Hall, and the church of Saint John Zachary were in flames. They were also told that the greater part of Cheapside was on fire, and wholly impassable — while the destructive element was invading at one and the same time Guildhall and the Royal Exchange. They furthermore learnt that the conflagration had spread fearfully along the side of the river, had passed Queenhithe, consuming all the wharfs and warehouses in its way, and having just destroyed Paul's Wharf, was at that time assailing Baynard's Castle. This intelligence determined them not to attempt to proceed further into the city, which they saw was wholly impracticable; and they accordingly turned down Ivy Lane, and approached the cathedral with the intention, if possible, of ascending the central tower. They found a swarm of booksellers' porters and assistants at the northern entrance, engaged in transporting immense bales of books and paper to the vaults in Saint Faith's, where it was supposed the stock would be in safety, permission to that effect having been obtained from the Dean and Chapter.

Forcing their way through this crowd, Leonard

and his companions crossed the transept, and proceeded towards the door of the spiral staircase leading to the central tower. It was open, and they passed through it. On reaching the summit of the tower, which they found occupied by some dozen or twenty persons, a spectacle that far exceeded the utmost stretch of their imaginations burst upon them. Through clouds of tawny smoke scarcely distinguishable from flame, so thickly were they charged with sparks and fire-flakes, they beheld a line of fire spreading along Cheapside and Cornhill, as far as the Royal Exchange, which was now in flames, and branching upwards in another line through Lawrence Lane to Guildhall, which was likewise burning. Nearer to them, on the north, the fire kindled by the wretched Pillichody, who only, perhaps, anticipated the work of destruction by a few hours, had, as they had heard, proceeded to Goldsmiths' Hall, and was rapidly advancing down Saint Anne's Lane to Aldersgate. But it was on the right, and to the south-east, that the conflagration assumed its most terrific aspect. There, from Bow Church to the river side, beyond the bridge as far as Billingsgate, and from thence up Mincing Lane, crossing Fenchurch Street and Lime Street to Gracechurch and Cornhill, describing a space of more than two miles in length and one in depth, every habitation was on fire. The appearance of this bed of flame was like an ocean of fire agitated by a tempest, in which a

number of barks were struggling, some of them being each moment engulphed. The stunning and unearthly roar of the flames aided this appearance, which was further heightened by the enormous billows of flame that ever and anon rolled tumultuously onward as they were caught by some gust of wind of more than usual violence. The spires of the churches looked like the spars of "tall ammirals" that had foundered, while the blackening ruins of the halls and larger buildings well represented the ribs and beams of mighty hulks.

Leaving Leonard and his companions to the contemplation of this tremendous spectacle, we shall proceed to take a nearer view of its ravages.

Every effort had been used to preserve the Royal Exchange by the city authorities, and by the engineers headed by the King in person. All the buildings in its vicinity were demolished. But in vain. The irresistible and unrelenting foe drove the defenders back as before — seized upon their barricades, and used them, like a skilful besieger, against the fortress they sought to protect. Solomon Eagle, who was mounted upon a heap of ruins, witnessed this scene of destruction, and uttered a laugh of exultation as the flames seized upon their prey.

"I told you," he cried, "that the extortioners and usurers who resorted to that building, and made gold their God, would be driven forth, and their temple destroyed. And my words have

come to pass. It burns—it burns — and so shall they if they turn not from their ways."

Hearing this wild speech, and beholding the extraordinary figure of the enthusiast, whose scorched locks and smoke-begrimed limbs gave him almost the appearance of an infernal spirit, the King inquired with some trepidation from his attendants who, or what he was, and being informed, ordered them to seize him. But the enthusiast set their attempts at nought. Springing with wonderful agility from fragment to fragment of the ruins, and continuing his vociferations, he at last plunged through the flame into the Exchange itself, rendering further pursuit, of course, impossible, unless those who desired to capture him, were determined to share his fate, which now seemed inevitable. To the astonishment of all, however, he appeared a few minutes afterwards on the roof of the blazing pile, and continued his denunciations till driven away by the flames. He seemed, indeed, to bear a charmed life, for it was rumoured—though the report was scarcely credited—that he had escaped from the burning building, and made good his retreat to Saint Paul's. Soon after this the Exchange was one mass of flame. Having gained an entrance to the galleries, the fire ran round them with inconceivable swiftness, as was the case in the conflagration of this later structure, and filling every chamber, gushed out of the windows, and poured

down upon the courts and walks below. Fearful and prodigious was the ruin that ensued. The stone walls cracked with the intense heat—tottered and fell — the pillars shivered and broke asunder — the statues dropped from their niches, and were destroyed, one only surviving the wreck — that of the illustrious founder Sir Thomas Gresham.

Deploring the fate of the Royal Exchange, the King and his attendants proceeded to Guildhall. But here they were too late, nor could they even rescue a tithe of the plate and valuables lodged within it for security. The effects of the fire as displayed in this structure, were singularly grand and surprising. The greater part of the ancient fabric being composed of oak of the hardest kind, it emitted little flame, but became after a time red hot, and remained in this glowing state till night, when it resembled, as an eye-witness describes it, "a mighty palace of gold, or a great building of burnished brass."

The greatest fury of the conflagration was displayed at the Poultry, where five distinct fires met, and united their forces,—one which came roaring down Cornhill from the Royal Exchange — a second down Threadneedle Street — a third up Walbrook — a fourth along Bucklersbury—and the fifth, that marched against the wind up Cheapside, all these uniting, as at a focus, a whirl of flame, an intensity of heat, and a thundering

roar were produced, such as were nowhere else experienced.

To return to the party on the central tower of the cathedral. Stunned and half stifled by the roar and smoke, Leonard and his companions descended from their lofty post, and returned to the body of the fane. They were about to issue forth, when Leonard glancing down the northern aisle, perceived the Earl of Rochester and Lord Argentine standing together at the lower end of it. Their gestures showed that it was not an amicable meeting, and mindful of what had passed at Whitehall, Leonard resolved to abide the result. Presently, he saw Lord Argentine turn sharply round, and strike his companion in the face with his glove. The clash of swords instantly succeeded, and Leonard and Wingfield started forward to separate the combatants. Blaize followed, but more cautiously, contenting himself with screaming at the top of his voice, "Murder! murder! sacrilege! a duel! a duel!"

Wingfield was the first to arrive at the scene of strife, but just as he reached the combatants, who were too much blinded by passion to notice his approach, Lord Argentine struck his adversary's weapon from his grasp, and would have followed up the advantage if the farmer had not withheld his arm. Enraged at the interference, Argentine turned his fury against the new comer, and strove to use his sword against him, — but in the terri-

ble struggle that ensued, and at the close of which they fell together, the weapon, as if directed by the hand of an avenging fate, passed through his own breast, inflicting a mortal wound.

"Susan Wingfield is avenged," said the farmer, as he arose, drenched in the blood of his opponent.

"Susan Wingfield!" exclaimed the wounded man, — "what was she to you?"

"Much," replied the farmer. "She was my daughter."

"Ah!" exclaimed Argentine, with an expression of unutterable anguish. "Let me have your forgiveness," he groaned.

"You have it," replied Wingfield, kneeling beside him, "and may God pardon us both—you for the wrong you did my daughter, me for being accidentally the cause of your death. But I trust you are not mortally hurt?"

"I have not many minutes to live," replied Argentine. "But is not that Leonard Holt?"

"It is," said Rochester, stepping forward.

"I can, then, do one rightful act before I die," he said, raising himself on one hand, and holding the other forcibly to his side, so as to stanch in some degree the effusion of blood. "Leonard Holt," he continued, "my sister Isabella loves you—deeply, devotedly. I have tried to conquer the passion, but in vain. You have my consent to wed her."

"I am a witness to your words, my lord," said

Rochester, "and I call upon all present to be so likewise."

"Rochester, you were once my friend," groaned Argentine, "and may yet be a friend to the dead. Remember the King sells titles. Teach this young man how to purchase one. My sister must not wed one of his degree."

"Make yourself easy on that score," replied Rochester; "he has already sufficient claim upon the King. He saved his life yesterday."

"He will trust to a broken reed if he trusts to Charles's gratitude," replied Argentine. "Buy the title—*buy* it, I say. My sister left me yesterday. I visited my anger on her, and she fled. I believe she took refuge with Doctor Hodges, but I am sure he can tell you where she is. One thing more," continued the dying man, fixing his glazing eyes on Leonard. "Go to Newgate — to — to a prisoner there — an incendiary — and obtain a document from him. Tell him, with my dying breath I charged you to do this. It will enable you to act as I have directed. Promise me you will go. Promise me you will fulfil my injunctions."

"I do," replied Leonard.

"Enough," rejoined Argentine. "May you be happy with Isabella." And removing his hand from his side, a copious effusion of blood followed, and sinking backwards, he expired.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BURNING OF SAINT PAUL'S.

Several other persons having by this time come up, the body of Lord Argentine was conveyed to Bishop Kempe's chapel, and left there till a fitting season should arrive for its removal. Confounded by the tragical event that had taken place, Leonard remained with his eyes fixed upon the blood-stained pavement, until he was roused by an arm which gently drew him away, while the voice of the Earl of Rochester breathed in his ear, "This is a sad occurrence, Leonard, and yet it is most fortunate for you, for it removes the only obstacle to your union with the Lady Isabella. You see how fleeting life is, and how easily we may be deprived of it. I tried to reason Lord Argentine into calmness, but nothing would satisfy him except my blood, and there he lies, though not by my hand. Let his fate be a lesson to us, and teach us to live in charity with each other. I have wronged you — deeply wronged you—but I will make all the atonement in my power, and let me think I am forgiven."

The blood rushed tumultuously to Leonard's heart, as he listened to what the Earl said, but overcoming his feelings of aversion by a powerful effect, he took the proffered hand.

"I do forgive you, my lord," he said.

"These words have removed a heavy weight from my soul," replied Rochester, "and if Death should trip up my heels as suddenly as he did his who perished on this spot, I shall be better prepared to meet him. And now let me advise you to repair to Newgate without delay, and see the wretched man, and obtain the document from him. The fire will reach the gaol ere long, and the prisoners must of necessity be removed. Amid the confusion his escape might be easily accomplished."

"Recollect, my lord, that the direful conflagration now prevailing without is owing to him," replied Leonard. "I will never be accessary to his escape."

"And yet his death by the public executioner" —urged Rochester. "Think of its effect on his daughter."

"Justice must take its course," rejoined Leonard. "I would not aid him to escape if he were my own father."

"In that case, nothing more is to be said," replied Rochester. "But at all events see him as quickly as you can. I would accompany you, but my duty detains me here. When you return from

your errand you will find me at my post near the entrance of the church-yard in front of Saint Michael's le Quern,—that is, if I am not beaten from it. Having seen the father, your next business must be to seek out the daughter, and remove her from this dangerous neighbourhood. You have heard where she is to be found."

Upon this, they separated,—Leonard and his two companions quitting the cathedral by the great western entrance, and proceeding towards Paul's Alley, and the Earl betaking himself to the north-east corner of the church-yard. The former got as far as Ivy Lane, but found it wholly impassable, in consequence of the goods and furniture with which it was blocked up. They were, therefore, obliged to return to the precincts of the cathedral, where Blaize, who was greatly terrified by what he had seen, expressed his determination of quitting them, and hurried back to the sacred pile. Leonard and the farmer next essayed to get up Ave-Maria Lane, but finding it impassable, they made for Ludgate, and after a long delay and severe struggle, got through the portal. The Old Bailey was entirely filled with persons removing their goods, and they were here informed, to their great dismay, that the conflagration had already reached Newgate Market, which was burning with the greatest fury, and was at that moment seizing upon the gaol. No one, however, in answer to Leonard's inquiries, could tell him what had become of the prisoners.

"I suppose they have left them to burn," observed a by-stander who heard the question, with a malicious look; "and it is the best way of getting rid of them."

Paying no attention to the remark, nor to the brutal laugh accompanying it, Leonard, assisted by Wingfield, fought his way through the crowd till he reached the prison. Flames were bursting through its grated windows, and both wings, as well as the massive gate connecting them, were on fire. Regardless of the risk he ran, Leonard forced his way to the Lodge door, where two turnkeys were standing, removing their goods.

"What has become of the prisoners?" he asked.

"The debtors are set free," replied the turnkey addressed, "and all but one or two of the common felons are removed."

"And where are those poor creatures?" cried Leonard, horror stricken.

"In the Stone Hold," replied the turnkey.

"And have you left them to perish there?" demanded Leonard.

"We couldn't help it," rejoined the turnkey. "It would have been risking our lives to venture near them. One is a murderer, taken in the fact; and the other is quite as bad, for he set the city on fire, so it 's right and fair he should perish by his own contrivance."

"Where does the Stone Hold lie?" cried Leonard, in a tone that startled the turnkey. "I must get these prisoners out."

"You can't, I tell you," rejoined the turnkey, doggedly. "They 're burnt to a cinder by this time."

"Give me your keys, and show me the way to the cell," cried Leonard, authoritatively. "I will at least attempt to save them."

"Well, if you're determined to put an end to yourself, you may try," replied the turnkey; "but I 've warned you as to what you may expect. This way," he added, opening a door, from which a thick volume of smoke issued, "if any of 'em 's alive, you 'll soon know it by the cries."

And, as if in answer to the remark, a most terrific shriek at that moment burst on their ears.

"Here are the keys," cried the turnkey, delivering them to Leonard. "You 're not going, too?" he added, as Wingfield pushed past him. "A couple of madmen! I shouldn't wonder if they were incendiaries."

Directed by the cries, Leonard pressed forward through the blinding and stifling smoke. After proceeding about twenty yards, he arrived at a cross passage where the smoke was not quite so dense, as it found an escape through a small grated aperture in the wall. And here a horrible sight was presented to him. At the further

extremity of this passage was a small cell, from which the cries he had heard issued. Not far from it the stone roof had fallen in, and from the chasm thus caused the flames were pouring into the passage. Regardless of the risk he ran, Leonard dashed forward, and reaching the cell, beheld Grant, still living, but in such a dreadful state that it was evident his sufferings must soon be ended. His hair and beard were singed close to his head and face, and his flesh was blistered, blackened, and scorched to the bone. On seeing Leonard, he uttered a hoarse cry, and attempted to speak, but the words rattled in his throat. He then staggered forward, and to Leonard's inexpressible horror, thrust his arms through the bars of the cage, which were literally red-hot. Seeing he had something in one hand, though he could not unclose his fingers, Leonard took it from him, and the wretched man fell backwards. At this moment a loud crack was heard in the wall behind. Several ponderous stones dropped from their places, admitting a volume of flame that filled the whole cell, and disclosing another body on the floor, near which lay that of Grant. Horrified by the spectacle, Leonard staggered off, and catching Wingfield's arm, sought to retrace his steps. This was no easy matter, the smoke being so dense that they could not see a foot before them, and were obliged to feel their way along the wall. On arriving at the cross passage, Wingfield would fain have

turned off to the right, but Leonard drew him forcibly in the opposite direction, and most fortunate was it that he did so, or the worthy farmer would inevitably have perished. At last, they reached the lodge, and sank down on a bench from exhaustion.

"So, my masters," observed the turnkey, with a grim smile, "you were not able to rescue them, I perceive?" But receiving no answer, he added, "Well, and what did you see?"

"A sight that would have moved even your stony heart to compassion," returned Leonard, getting up and quitting the lodge. Followed by Wingfield, and scarcely knowing where he was going, he forced his way through the crowd, and dashing down Snow Hill, did not stop till he reached Holborn conduit, where seizing a leathern bucket, he filled it with water, and plunged his head into it. Refreshed by the immersion, he now glanced at the document committed to him by Grant. It was a piece of parchment, and showed by its shrivelled and scorched appearance the agony which its late possessor must have endured. Leonard did not open it, but thrust it with a shudder into his doublet.

Meditating on the strange and terrible events that had just occurred, Leonard's thoughts involuntarily wandered to the Lady Isabella, whose image appeared to him like a bright star shining on troubled waters, and for the first time venturing to

indulge a hope that she might indeed be his, he determined immediately to proceed in search of her.

It was now high noon, but the mid-day sun was scarcely visible, or, visible at all as it struggled through the masses of yellow vapour, it looked red as blood. Bands of workmen were demolishing houses on the western side of Fleet Ditch, and casting the rubbish into the muddy sluice before them, by which means it was confidently but vainly hoped that the progress of the fire would be checked. Shaping their course along the opposite side of the ditch, and crossing to Fleet Bridge, Leonard and his companion passed through Salisbury Court to Whitefriars, and taking a boat, directed the waterman to land them at Puddle Dock. The river was still covered with craft of every description laden with goods, and Baynard's Castle, an embattled stone structure of great strength and solidity, built at the beginning of the fifteenth century, on the site of another castle as old as the Conquest, being now wrapped in flames from foundation to turret, offered a magnificent spectacle. From this point the four ascents leading to the cathedral, namely, Addle Hill, Saint Bennet's Hill, Saint Peter's Hill, and Lambert Hill, with all their throng of habitations were burning—the black lines of ruined walls standing in bold relief against the white sheet of flame. Billows of fire rolled upwards every moment to-

wards Saint Paul's, and threatened it with destruction.

Landing at the appointed place, Leonard and his companion ascended Saint Andrew's Hill, and, proceeding along Carter Lane, soon gained the precincts of the cathedral. Here the whole mass of habitations on the summit of Saint Bennet's Hill, extending from the eastern end of Carter Lane to Distaff Lane, was on fire, and the flames were dashed by the fierce wind against the south-east corner of the cathedral. A large crowd was collected at this point, and great efforts were made to save the venerable pile, but Leonard saw that its destruction was inevitable. Forcing a way through the throng with his companion, they reached Doctor Hodges's residence at the corner of Watling Street, and Leonard, without waiting to knock, tried the door, which yielded to his touch. The habitation was empty, and from the various articles scattered about, it was evident its inmates must have fled with the greatest precipitation. Alarmed at this discovery, Leonard rushed forth with Wingfield, and sought to ascertain from the crowd without whither Dr. Hodges was gone, but could learn nothing more than that he had departed with his whole household a few hours before. At last, it occurred to him that he might obtain some information from the Earl of Rochester, and he was about to cross to the other side of the churchyard, when he was arrested by

a simultaneous cry of horror from the assemblage. Looking upwards, for there he saw the general gaze directed, he perceived that the scaffolding around the roof and tower of the cathedral had kindled, and was enveloping the whole upper part of the fabric in a net-work of fire. Flames were likewise bursting from the belfry, and from the lofty pointed windows below it, flickering and playing round the hoary buttresses, and disturbing the numerous jackdaws that built in their time-worn crevices, and now flew screaming forth. As Leonard gazed at the summit of the tower, he discerned through the circling eddies of smoke that enveloped it, the figure of Solomon Eagle standing on the top of the battlements and waving his staff, and almost fancied he could hear his voice. After remaining in this perilous situation for some minutes, as if to raise anxiety for his safety to the highest pitch, the enthusiast sprang upon a portion of the scaffolding that was only partly consumed, and descended from pole to pole, regardless whether burning or not, with marvellous swiftness, and apparently without injury. Alighting on the roof, he speeded to the eastern extremity of the fane, and there commenced his exhortations to the crowd below.

It now became evident also, from the strange roaring noise proceeding from the tower, that the flames were descending the spiral staircase, and forcing their way through some secret doors or

passages to the roof. Determined to take one last survey of the interior of the cathedral before its destruction, which he now saw was inevitable, Leonard motioned to Wingfield, and forcing his way through the crowd, which was now considerably thinned, entered the southern door. He had scarcely gained the middle of the transept, when the door opened behind him, and two persons, whom, even in the brief glimpse he caught of them, he knew to be Chowles and Judith, darted towards the steps leading to Saint Faith's. They appeared to be carrying a large chest, but Leonard was too much interested in what was occurring to pay much attention to them. There were but few persons besides himself and his companion within the cathedral, and these few were chiefly booksellers' porters, who were hurrying out of Saint Faith's in the utmost trepidation. By and by, these were gone, and they were alone,—alone within that vast structure, and at such a moment. Their situation, though perilous, was one that awakened thrilling and sublime emotions. The cries of the multitude, coupled with the roaring of the conflagration, resounded from without, while the fierce glare of the flames lighted up the painted windows at the head of the choir with unwonted splendour. Overhead was heard a hollow rumbling noise like that of distant thunder, which continued for a short time, while fluid streams of smoke crept through the mighty rafters of the roof, and gradu-

ally filled the whole interior of the fabric with vapour. Suddenly a tremendous cracking was heard, as if the whole pile were tumbling in pieces. So appalling was this sound, that Leonard and his companion would have fled, but they were completely transfixed by terror.

While they were in this state, the flames, which had long been burning in secret, burst through the roof at the further end of the choir, and instantaneously spread over its whole expanse. At this juncture, a cry of wild exultation was heard in the great northern gallery, and looking up Leonard beheld Solomon Eagle, hurrying with lightning swiftness round it, and shouting in tones of exultation, "My words have come to pass —it burns—it burns—and will be utterly consumed!"

The vociferations of the enthusiast were answered by a piercing cry from below, proceeding from Blaize, who at that moment rushed from the entrance of Saint Faith's. On seeing the porter, Leonard shouted to him, and the poor fellow hurried towards him. At this juncture, a strange hissing sound was heard, as if a heavy shower of rain was descending upon the roof, and through the yawning gap over the choir there poured a stream of molten lead of silvery brightness. Nothing can be conceived more beautiful than this shining yet terrible cascade, which descended with momentarily increasing fury, sparkling, flashing, hissing, and

consuming all before it. All the elaborately-carved wood-work and stalls upon which it fell were presently in flames. Leonard and his companions now turned to fly, but they had scarcely moved a few paces when another fiery cascade burst through the roof near the great western entrance, for which they were making, flooding the aisles and plashing against the massive columns. At the same moment, too, a third stream began to fall over the northern transept, not far from where Blaize stood, and a few drops of the burning metal reaching him, caused him to utter the most fearful outcries. Seriously alarmed, Leonard and Wingfield now rushed to one of the monuments in the northern aisle, and hastily clambering it, reached a window, which they burst open. Blaize followed them, but not without receiving a few accidental plashes from the fiery torrents, which elicited from him the most astounding yells. Having helped him to climb the monument, Leonard pushed him through the window after Wingfield, and then cast his eye round the building before he himself descended. The sight was magnificent in the extreme. From the flaming roof three silvery cascades descended. The choir was in flame, and a glowing stream like lava was spreading over the floor, and slowly trickling down the steps leading to the body of the church. The transepts and the greater part of the nave were

similarly flooded. Above the roar of the flames and the hissing plash of the descending torrents, was heard the wild laughter of Solomon Eagle. Perceiving him in one of the arcades of the southern gallery, Leonard shouted to him to descend, and make good his escape while there was yet time, adding that in a few moments it would be too late.

"I shall never quit it more," rejoined the enthusiast, in a voice of thunder, "but shall perish with the fire I have kindled. No monarch on earth ever lighted a nobler funeral pyre."

And as Leonard passed through the window, he disappeared along the gallery. Breaking through the crowd collected round Wingfield and Blaize, and calling to them to follow him, Leonard made his way to the north-east of the churchyard, where he found a large assemblage of persons, in the midst of which were the King, the Duke of York, Rochester, Arlington, and many others. As Leonard advanced, Charles discerned him amid the crowd, and motioned him to come forward. A passage was then cleared for him, through which Wingfield and Blaize, who kept close beside him, were permitted to pass.

"I am glad to find no harm has happened to you, friend," said Charles, as he approached. "Rochester informed me you were gone to Newgate, and as the gaol has been burnt down, I

feared you might have met with the same mishap. I now regret that I did not adopt your plan, but it may not be yet too late."

"It is not too late to save a portion of your city, sire," replied Leonard; "but, alas! how much is gone!"

"It is so," replied the King mournfully.

Further conversation was here interrupted by the sudden breaking out of the fire from the magnificent rose window of the cathedral, the effect of which, being extraordinarily fine, attracted the monarch's attention. By this time Solomon Eagle had again ascended the roof, and making his way to the eastern extremity, clasped the great stone cross that terminated it with his left hand, while with his right he menaced the King and his party, uttering denunciations that were lost in the terrible roar prevailing around him. The flames now raged with a fierceness wholly inconceivable, considering the material they had to work upon. The molten lead poured down in torrents, and not merely flooded the whole interior of the fabric, but ran down in a wide and boiling stream almost as far as the Thames, consuming everything in its way, and rendering the very pavements red-hot. Every stone spout and gutter in the sacred pile, of which there were some hundreds, added to this fatal shower, and scattered destruction far and wide; nor will this be wondered at when it is considered that the quan-

tity of lead thus melted covered a space of no less than six acres. Having burned with incredible fury and fierceness for some time, the whole roof of the sacred structure fell in at once, with a crash heard at an amazing distance. After an instant's pause, the flames burst forth from every window in the fabric, producing such an intensity of heat that the stone pinnacles, transom beams, and mullions split and cracked with a sound like volleys of artillery, shivering and flying in every direction. The whole interior of the pile was now one vast sheet of flame, which soared upwards, and consumed even the very stones. Not a vestige of the reverend structure was left untouched, —its bells—its plate — its woodwork — its monuments—its mighty pillars—its galleries—its chapels—all, all were destroyed. The fire raged throughout all that night and the next day, till it had consumed all but the mere shell, and rendered the venerable cathedral, "one of the most ancient pieces of piety in the Christian world," to use the words of Evelyn, a heap of ruins and ashes.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW LEONARD RESCUED THE LADY ISABELLA.

The course of events, having been somewhat anticipated in the last Chapter, it will now be necessary to return to an earlier stage in the destruction of the cathedral, namely, soon after the furious bursting forth of the flames from the great eastern windows. While Leonard in common with the rest of the assemblage was gazing at this magnificent spectacle, he heard a loud cry of distress behind him, and turning at the sound, beheld Doctor Hodges rush forth from an adjoining house, the upper part of which was on fire, almost in a state of distraction. An elderly man and woman, and two or three female servants, all of whom were crying as loudly as himself, followed him. But their screams fell on indifferent ears, for the crowd had become by this time too much accustomed to such appeals to pay any particular attention to them, Leonard, however, instantly rushed towards the Doctor and anxiously inquired what was the matter; the

latter was so bewildered that he did not recognize the voice of the speaker, but gazing up at the house, with indescribable anguish cried, "Merciful God! the flames have by this time reached her room—she will be burned—horror!"

"Who will be burned!" cried Leonard, seizing his arm, and gazing at him with a look of apprehension and anguish equal to his own — "Not the Lady Isabella?"

"Yes, Isabella," replied Hodges, regarding the speaker, and for the first time perceiving by whom he was addressed. "Not a moment is to be lost if you would save her from a terrible death. She was left in a fainting state in one of the upper rooms by a female attendant, who deserted her mistress to save herself. The staircase is on fire, or I myself would have saved her."

"A ladder! a ladder!" cried Leonard.

"Here is one!" cried Wingfield, pointing to one propped against an adjoining house.

And in another moment, by the combined efforts of the crowd, the ladder was brought and placed against the burning building.

"Which is the window?" cried Leonard.

"That on the right, on the second floor," replied Hodges. "Gracious heaven! the flames are bursting from it."

But Leonard's foot was now on the ladder, and rushing up with inconceivable swiftness he plunged through the window regardless of the flame. All

those who witnessed this daring deed, regarded his destruction as certain, and even Hodges gave him up for lost. But the next moment he appeared at the window, bearing the fainting female form in his arms, and with extraordinary dexterity obtaining a firm footing and hold of the ladder, descended in safety. The shout that burst from such part of the assemblage as had witnessed this achievement, and its successful termination, attracted the King's attention, and he inquired the cause of the clamour.

"I will ascertain it for your Majesty," replied Rochester, and proceeding to the group, he learnt, to his great satisfaction, what had occurred.

Having gained this intelligence, he flew back to the King, and briefly explained the situation of the parties. Doctor Hodges, it appeared, had just removed to the house in question, which belonged to one of his patients, as a temporary asylum, and the Lady Isabella had accompanied him. She was in the upper part of the house when the fire broke out, and was so much terrified that she swooned away, in which condition her attendant left her; nor was the latter so much to blame as might appear, for the stairs were burning at the time, and a moment's delay would have endangered her own safety.

"Fate, indeed, seems to have brought these young persons together," replied Charles, as he listened to Rochester's recital, who took this op-

portunity of acquainting him with Lord Argentine's dying injunctions, "and it would be a pity to separate them."

"I am sure your Majesty has no such intention," said Rochester.

"You will see," rejoined the Monarch.

And as he spoke, he turned his horse's head, and moved towards the spot where Leonard was kneeling beside Isabella and supporting her. Some restoratives having been applied by Doctor Hodges, she had regained her sensibility, and was murmuring her thanks to her deliverer.

"She has not lost her beauty I perceive," cried Charles, gazing at her with admiration, and feeling something of his former passion revive within his breast.

"Your Majesty, I trust, will not mar their happiness," said Rochester, noticing the monarch's libertine look with uneasiness. "Remember, you owe your life to that young man."

"And I will pay the debt royally," replied Charles; "I will give him permission to marry her."

"Your Majesty's permission is scarcely needed," muttered Rochester.

"There you are wrong, my lord," replied the King. "She is now my ward, and I can dispose of her in marriage as I please; nor will I so dispose of her except to her equal in rank."

"I discern your Majesty's gracious inten-

tions," replied Rochester, gratefully inclining his head.

"I almost forget my deliverer's name," whispered Charles, with a smile, "but it is of no consequence, since he will so speedily change it."

"His name is Leonard Holt," replied Rochester, in the same tone.

"Ah!—true," returned the King. "What ho! good master Leonard Holt," he added, addressing the young man, "commit the Lady Isabella Argentine to the care of our worthy friend Doctor Hodges for a moment, and stand up before me." His injunctions being complied with, he continued, "The Lady Isabella Argentine and I owe our lives to you, and we must both evince our gratitude—she by devoting that life, which, if I am not misinformed, she will be right willing to do, to you, and I by putting you in a position to unite yourself to her. The title of Argentine has been this day extinguished by most unhappy circumstances, I, therefore, confer the title on you, and here in this presence create you Baron Argentine, of Argentine, in Staffordshire. Your patent shall be made out with all convenient despatch, and with it you shall receive the hand of the sole representative of that ancient and noble house."

"Your Majesty overwhelms me," replied Leonard, falling on his knee and pressing the King's hand, which was kindly extended towards him,

to his lips. "I can scarcely persuade myself I am not in a dream."

"You will soon awaken to the sense of the joyful reality," returned the King. "Have I not now discharged my debt?" he added, to Rochester.

"Right royally, indeed, my liege, replied the Earl, in a tone of unaffected emotion. "My lord," he added, grasping Leonard's hand, "I sincerely congratulate you on your newly-acquired dignities, nor less in the happiness that awaits you there."

"If I do not answer you fittingly," my lord, replied the new-made peer, "it is not because I do not feel your kindness. But my brain reels. Pray heaven my senses may not desert me."

"You must not forget the document you obtained this morning, my lord," replied Rochester, endeavouring to divert his thoughts into a new channel. "The proper moment for consulting it may have arrived."

Lord Argentine, for we shall henceforth give him his title, thrust his hand into his doublet and drew forth the parchment. He opened it and endeavoured to read it, but a mist swam before his eyes.

"Let me look at it," said Rochester, taking it from him. "It is a deed of gift," he said, after glancing at it for a moment, "from the late Lord Argentine—I mean the elder baron—of a large

estate in Yorkshire, which he possessed in right of his wife, to you, my lord, here described as Leonard Holt, provided you shall marry the Lady Isabella Argentine. Another piece of good fortune. Again and again, I congratulate you."

"And now," said Charles, "other and less pleasing matters claim our attention. Let the Lady Isabella be removed under the charge of Doctor Hodges to Whitehall, where apartments shall be provided for her at once, together with fitting attendants, and where she can remain till this terrible conflagration is over, which, I trust, soon will be, when I will no longer delay her happiness, but give her away in person. Chiffinch," he added to the chief page, "see all this carried into effect."

"I will, my liege, and right willingly," replied Chiffinch.

"I would send you with her, my lord," pursued Charles to Argentine, "but I have other duties for you to fulfil. The plan you proposed of demolishing the houses with gunpowder, shall be immediately put into operation under your own superintendence."

A chair was now brought, and the Lady Isabella, after a tender parting with her lover, being placed within it, she was thus transported, under the charge of Hodges and Chiffinch, to Whitehall, where she arrived in safety, though not without having sustained some hinderance and inconvenience.

She had not been gone many minutes when the conflagration of the cathedral assumed its most terrific character; the whole of the mighty roof falling in, and the flames soaring upwards as before related. Up to this time, Solomon Eagle had maintained his position at the eastern end of the roof, and still grasped the stone cross. His situation now attracted universal attention, and it was evident he must speedily perish.

"Poor wretch!" exclaimed the King, shuddering, "I fear there is no way of saving him."

"None whatever, my liege," replied Rochester, "nor do I believe he would consent to it if there was. But he is again menacing your Majesty."

As Rochester spoke, Solomon Eagle shook his arm menacingly at the royal party, raising it aloft, as if invoking the vengeance of heaven. He then knelt down upon the sloping ridge of the roof, as if in prayer, and his figure, thus seen relieved against the mighty sheet of flame, might have been taken for an image of Saint John the Baptist, carved in stone. Not an eye in the vast crowd below but was fixed on him. In a few moments, he rose again, and tossing his arms aloft, and shrieking in a voice distinctly heard above the awful roar around him, the single word, "*Resurgam!*" flung himself headlong into the flaming abyss. A simultaneous cry of horror rose from the whole assemblage on beholding this desperate action.

"The last exclamation of the poor wretch may apply to the cathedral as well as to himself," remarked the monarch to a middle-aged personage with a pleasing and highly-intellectual countenance, standing near him: "for the old building shall rise again, like the phœnix from its fires, with renewed beauty, and under your superintendence, Doctor Christopher Wren."

The great architect bowed.

"I cannot hope to erect such another structure," he said, modestly; "but I will endeavour to design an edifice that shall not disgrace your Majesty's city."

"You must build me another city at the same time, Doctor Wren," sighed the King. "Ah!" he added, "is not that Mr. Lilly, the almanac-maker, whom I see among the crowd?"

"It is," replied Rochester.

"Bid him come to me," replied the King. And the order being obeyed, he said to the astrologer, "Well, Mr. Lilly, your second prediction has come to pass. We have had the Plague, and now we have the Fire. You may thank my clemency that I do not order you to be cast into the flames, like the poor wretch who has just perished before our eyes, as a wizard and professor of the black art. How did you obtain information of these fatal events?"

"By a careful study of the Heavenly bodies, sire," replied Lilly, "and by long and patient

calculations, which, if your Majesty or any of your attendants had had leisure or inclination to make, would have afforded you the same information. *I* make no pretence to the gift of prophecy, but this calamity was predicted in the last century."

"Indeed! by whom?" asked the King.

"By Michael Nostradamus," replied Lilly. "His prediction runs thus:—

> Le sang du juste à Londres fera faute,
> Bruslez par feu, le vingt et trois, les Six ;
> La Dame antique cherra de place haute,
> De même secte plusieurs seront occis.*

And thus I venture to explain it. The 'blood of the just' refers to the impious and execrable murder of your Majesty's royal father of blessed memory. 'Three-and-twenty and six gives the exact year of the calamity; and it may likewise give us, as will be seen by computation hereafter, the amount of habitations to be destroyed. The 'Ancient Dame' undoubtedly refers to the venerable pile now burning before us, which, as it stands in the most eminent spot in the city, clearly 'falls from its high place.' The expression 'of the same sect,' refers not to men, but

* The blood of the just shall be wanting in London,
Burnt by fire of three-and-twenty, the Six ;
The ancient Dame shall fall from her high place,
Of the same sect many shall be killed.

churches, of which a large number, I grieve to say it, are already destroyed."

"The prophecy is a singular one," remarked Charles, musingly, "and you have given it a plausible interpretation." And for some moments, he appeared lost in reflection. Suddenly rousing himself, he took forth his tablets, and hastily tracing a few lines upon a leaf, tore it out, and delivered it with his signet ring to Lord Argentine. "Take this, my lord," he said, "to Lord Craven. You will find him at his post in Tower Street. A band of my attendants shall go with you. Embark at the nearest stairs you can—those at Blackfriars I should conceive the most accessible. Bid the men row for their lives. As soon as you join Lord Craven, commence operations. The Tower must be preserved at all hazards. Mark me!—at all hazards."

"I understand your Majesty," replied Argentine—"your commands shall be implicitly obeyed. And if the conflagration has not gone too far, I will answer with my life that I preserve the fortress."

And he departed on his mission.

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The Fate of Chowles and Judith.

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CHAPTER IX.

WHAT BEFEL CHOWLES AND JUDITH IN THE VAULTS OF SAINT FAITH'S.

Having now seen what occurred outside Saint Paul's, we shall proceed to the vaults beneath it. Chowles and Judith, it has been mentioned, were descried by Leonard, just before the outbreak of the fire, stealing into Saint Faith's, and carrying a heavy chest between them. This chest contained some of the altar-plate, which they had pillaged from the Convocation House. As they traversed the aisles of Saint Faith's, which were now filled with books and paper, they could distinctly hear the raging of the fire without, and Judith, who was far less intimidated than her companion, observed, "Let it roar on. It cannot injure us."

"I am not so sure of that," replied Chowles, doubtfully, "I wish we had taken our hoards elsewhere."

"There is no use in wishing that now," rejoined Judith. "And it would have been wholly impossible to get them out of the city. But

have no fear. The fire, I tell you, cannot reach us. It could as soon burn into the solid earth as into this place."

"It comforts me to hear you say so," replied Chowles. "And when I think of those mighty stone floors above us, I feel we are quite safe. No, no, it can never make its way through them."

Thus discoursing, they reached the charnel at the further end of the church, where Chowles struck a light, and producing a flask of strong waters, took a copious draught himself and handed the flask to Judith, who imitated his example. Their courage being thus stimulated, they opened the chest, and Chowles was so enraptured with its glittering contents that he commenced capering round the vault. Recalled to quietude by a stern reproof from Judith, he opened a secret door in the wall, and pushed the chest into a narrow passage beyond it. Fearful of being discovered in their retreat, they took a basket of provisions and liquor with them, and then closed the door. For some time, they proceeded along the passage, pushing the chest before them, until they came to a descent of a few steps, which brought them to a large vault, half-filled with bags of gold, chests of plate, caskets, and other plunder. At the further end of this vault was a strong wooden door. Pushing the chest into the middle of the chamber, Chowles seated himself upon it, and opening the basket of provisions, took out the bottle of spirits, and again had recourse to it.

"How comfortable and secure we feel in this quiet place," he said; "while all above us is burning. I declare I feel quite merry, ha! ha!" And he forced a harsh and a discordant laugh.

"Give me the bottle," rejoined Judith, sternly, "and don't grin like a death's head. I don't like to see the frightful face you make."

"It 's the first time you ever thought my face frightful," replied Chowles, "and I begin to think you are afraid."

"Afraid!" echoed Judith, forcing a derisive laugh in her turn; "afraid—of what!"

"Nay, I don't know," replied Chowles; "only I feel a little uncomfortable. What if we should not be able to breathe here? The very idea gives me a tightness across the chest."

"Silence!" cried Judith, with a fierceness that effectually ensured obedience to her command.

Chowles again had recourse to the bottle, and deriving a false courage from it, as before, commenced skipping about the chamber in his usual fantastical manner. Judith did not attempt to check him, but remained with her chin resting upon her hand gazing at him.

"Do you remember the Dance of Death, Judith?" he cried, executing some of the wildest flourishes he had then performed, "and how I surprised the Earl of Rochester and his crew?"

"I do," replied Judith, sternly, "and I hope we may not soon have to perform that dance together in reality."

"It was a merry night," rejoined Chowles, who did not hear what she said, "a right merry night—and so to-night shall be, in spite of what is occurring overhead. Ha! ha!" And he took another long pull at the flask. "I breathe freely now." And he continued his wild flourishes until he was completely exhausted. He then sat down by Judith, and would have twined his bony arms round her neck, but she roughly repulsed him.

With a growl of displeasure, he then proceeded to open and examine the various bags, chests, and caskets piled upon the floor, and the sight of their contents so excited Judith, that, shaking off her misgivings, she joined him, and they continued opening case after case, glutting their greedy eyes, until Chowles became aware that the vault was filled with smoke. As soon as he perceived this, he started to his feet in terror.

"We are lost! — we shall be suffocated!" he cried.

Judith likewise arose, and her looks showed that she shared in his apprehensions.

"We must not stay here," cried Chowles; "and yet," he added, with an agonized look at the rich store before him, "the treasure! the treasure!"

"Ay, let us, at least, take something with us," rejoined Judith, snatching up two or three of the most valuable caskets.

While Chowles gazed at the heap before him, hesitating what to select, the smoke grew so dense around them, that Judith seized his arm and dragged him away.

"I come—I come!" he cried, snatching up a bag of gold.

They then threaded the narrow passage, Judith leading the way and bearing the light. The smoke grew thicker and thicker as they advanced, but regardless of this, they hurried to the secret door leading to the charnel. Judith touched the spring, but as she did so, a sheet of flame burst in and drove her back. Chowles dashed past her, and with great presence of mind shut the door, excluding the flame. They then hastily retraced their steps, feeling that not a moment was to be lost if they would escape. The air in the vault, thickened by the smoke, had become so hot that they could scarcely breathe; added to which, to increase their terror, they heard the most awful cracking of the walls overhead, as if the whole fabric was breaking asunder to its foundation.

"The cathedral is tumbling upon us! We shall be buried alive!" exclaimed Chowles, as he listened with indescribable terror to the noise overhead.

"I owe my death to you, wretch!" cried

Judith, fiercely. "You persuaded me to come hither."

"I!" cried Chowles. "It is a lie! You were the person who proposed it. But for you, I should have left our hoards here, and come for them after the fire was over."

"It is you who lie," returned Judith, with increased fury, "that was my proposal."

"Hold your tongue, you she-devil," cried Chowles, "it is you who have brought me into this strait — and if you do not cease taunting me, I will silence you for ever."

"Coward and fool!" cried Judith, "I will at least have the satisfaction of seeing you die before me."

And as she spoke, she rushed towards him, and a desperate struggle commenced. And thus, while the walls were cracking overhead, threatening them with instant destruction, the two wretches continued their strife, uttering the most horrible blasphemies and execrations. Judith, being the stronger of the two, had the advantage, and she had seized her opponent by the throat with the intention of strangling him, when a most terrific crash was heard, causing her to loose her gripe. The air instantly became as hot as the breath of a furnace, and both started to their feet.

"What has happened?" gasped Chowles.

"I know not," replied Judith, "and I dare not look down the passage."

"Then I will," replied Chowles, and he advanced a few paces up it, and then hastily returned, shrieking, "it is filled with boiling lead, and the stream is flowing towards us."

Scarcely able to credit the extent of the danger, Judith gazed down the passage, and there beheld a glowing silvery stream trickling slowly onwards. She saw too well, that if they could not effect their retreat instantly, their fate was sealed.

"The door of the vault!" she cried, pointing towards it, "where is the key! where is the key!"

"I have not got it," replied Chowles, distractedly, "I cannot tell where to find it."

"Then we are lost," cried Judith, with a terrible execration.

"Not so," replied Chowles, snatching up a pick-axe, "if I cannot unlock the door, I can break it open."

With this, he commenced furiously striking against it, while Judith, who was completely horror-stricken, and filled with the conviction that her last moments were at hand, fell on her knees beside him, and gazing down the passage, along which she could see the stream of molten lead, now nearly a foot in depth, gradually advancing, and hissing as it came, shrieked to Chowles to increase his exertions. He needed no incitement to do so, but nerved by fear, continued to deal blow after blow against the door, until at last he effected a

small breach just above the lock. But this only showed him how vain were his hopes, for a stream of fire and smoke poured through the aperture. Notwithstanding this, he continued his exertions, Judith shrieking all the time, until the lock at last yielded. He then threw open the door, but finding the whole passage involved in flame, was obliged to close it. Judith had now risen, and their looks at each other at this fearful moment were terrible in the extreme. Retreating to either side of the cell, they glared at each other like wild beasts. Suddenly, Judith casting her eyes to the entrance of the vault, uttered a yell of terror that caused her companion to look in that direction, and he perceived that the stream of molten lead had gained it, and was descending the steps. He made a rush towards the door at the same time with Judith, and another struggle ensued, in which he succeeded in dashing her upon the floor. He again opened the door, but was again driven backwards by the terrific flame, and perceived that the fiery current had reached Judith, who was writhing and shrieking in its embrace. Before Chowles could again stir it was upon him With a yell of anguish, he fell forward, and was instantly stifled in the glowing torrent, which in a short time flooded the whole chamber, burying the two partners in iniquity, and the whole of their ill-gotten gains, in its burning waves.

CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

Lord Argentine proceeded, as directed by the King, to the eastern end of Tower Street, where he found Lord Craven, and having delivered him the King's missive, and shown him the signet, they proceeded to the western side of the Tower dock, and having procured a sufficient number of miners and engineers, together with a supply of powder from the fortress, commenced undermining the whole of the row of habitations called Tower Bank, on the edge of the dock, having first, it is scarcely necessary to state, taken care to clear them of their inhabitants. The powder deposited, the trains were fired, and the buildings blown into the air. At this time, the whole of the western side of the Tower moat was covered with low wooden houses and sheds, and mindful of the King's instructions, Lord Argentine suggested to Lord Craven that they should be destroyed. The latter acquiescing, they proceeded to their task, and in a short time, the whole of the buildings of whatever description,

from the bulwark-gate to the city postern, at the north of the Tower, and nearly opposite the Bowyer Tower, were destroyed. Long before this was accomplished they were joined by the Duke of York, who lent his utmost assistance to the task, and when night came on, a clear space of at least a hundred yards in depth, had been formed between the ancient fortress, and the danger with which it was threatened.

Meantime, the conflagration continued to rage with unabated fury. It burnt throughout the whole of Monday night, and having destroyed Saint Paul's, as before related, poured down Ludgate Hill, consuming all in its way, and crossing Fleet Bridge, commenced its ravages upon the great thoroughfare adjoining it.

On Tuesday, an immense tract was on fire. All Fleet Street, as far as the Inner Temple, Ludgate Hill, and the whole of the city eastwards, along the banks of the Thames, up to the Tower Dock, where the devastation was checked by the vast gap of houses demolished, were in flames. From thence the boundary of the fire extended to the end of Mark Lane, Lime Street, and Leadenhall, the strong walls of which resisted its fury. Ascending again by the standard on Cornhill, Threadneedle Street, and Austin Friars, it embraced Draper's Hall, and the whole mass of buildings to the west of Throgmorton Street. It next proceeded to the then new buildings behind

Saint Margaret's, Lothbury, and so on westward to the upper end of Cateaton Street, whence it spread to the second postern in London Wall, and destroying the ramparts and suburbs as far as Cripplegate, consumed Little Wood Street, Mungwell Street, and the whole of the city wall on the west as far as Aldersgate. Passing a little to the north of Saint Sepulchre's, which it destroyed, it crossed Holborn Bridge, and ascending Saint Andrew's Hill passed the end of Shoe Lane, and so on to the end of Fetter Lane. The whole of the buildings contained within this boundary were now on fire, and burning with terrific fury. And so they continued till the middle of Wednesday, when the wind abating, and an immense quantity of houses being demolished, according to Lord Argentine's plan, the conflagration was got under; and though it broke out in several places after that time, little mischief was done, and it may be said to have ceased on the middle of that day.

On Saturday morning in that week, soon after daybreak, a young man, plainly yet richly attired in the habiliments then worn by persons of high rank, took his way over the smouldering heaps of rubbish, and along the ranks of ruined and blackened walls denoting the habitations that had once constituted Fleet Street. It was with no little risk, and some difficulty, that he could force his way—now clambering over heaps of smouldering ashes, now passing by some toppling wall, which

fell with a terrific crash after he had just passed it—now creeping under an immense pile of blackened rafters — but he at length reached Fleet Bridge, where he paused to gaze at the scene of devastation around him. It was, indeed, a melancholy sight, and drew tears to his eyes. The ravages of the fire were almost inconceivable. Great beams were burnt to charcoal — stones calcined, and as white as snow, and such walls and towers as were left standing were so damaged that their instant fall was to be expected. The very water in the wells and fountains was boiling, and even the muddy Fleet sent forth a hot steam. The fire still lingered in the lower parts of many habitations, especially where wine, spirits, or inflammable goods had been kept; and these "voragos of subterranean cellars," as Evelyn terms them, still emitted flames together with a prodigious smoke and stench. Undismayed by the dangers of the path he had to traverse, the young man ascended Ludgate Hill, still encountering the same devastation, and passing through the ruined gateway, the end of which remained perfect, approached what had once been Saint Paul's Cathedral. Mounting a heap of rubbish at the end of Ludgate Street, he gazed at the mighty ruin, which looked more like the remains of a city than those of a single edifice.

The solid walls and buttresses were split and rent asunder; enormous stones were splintered and

calcined by the heat; and vast flakes having scaled from off the pillars, gave them a hoary and almost ghostly appearance. Its enormous extent was now for the first time clearly seen, and strange to say, it looked twice as large in ruins as when entire. The central tower was still standing — but chipped, broken, and calcined like the rest of the structure, by the vehement heat of the flames. Part of the roof in its fall broke through the solid floor of the choir, which was of immense thickness, into Saint Faith's, and destroyed the magazine of books and paper deposited there by the booksellers. The portico, erected by Inigo Jones, and which found so much favour in Evelyn's eyes, that he describes it as "comparable to any in Europe," and particularly deplores its loss, shared the fate of the rest of the building,—the only part left uninjured being the architrave, the inscription on which was undefaced.

Having satiated himself with this sad but striking prospect, the young man, with some toil and trouble, crossed the churchyard and gained Cheapside, where a yet more terrific scene of devastation than that which he had previously witnessed burst upon him. On the right to London Bridge, which he could discern through the chasms of the houses, and almost to the Tower, were nothing but ruins, while a similar waste lay on the left. Such was the terrible change that had been wrought in the aspect of the ruined city, that if

the young man had not had some marks to guide him, he would not have known where he was. The tower and ruined walls of Saint Peter's church pointed out to him the entrance to Wood Street, and entering it, he traversed it with considerable difficulty,—for the narrow thoroughfares were much fuller of rubbish, and much less freed from smoke and fiery vapour, than the wider,—until he reached a part of it with which he had once been well acquainted. But, alas! how changed was that familiar spot. The house he sought was a mere heap of ruins. While gazing at them, he heard a voice behind him, and turning, beheld Mr. Bloundel and his son Stephen, forcing their way through what had once been Maiden Lane. A warm greeting passed between them, and Mr. Bloundel gazed for some time in silence upon the wreck of his dwelling. Tears forced themselves into his eyes, and his companions were no less moved. As he turned to depart, he observed to the young man with some severity. "How is it, Leonard, that I see you in this gay apparel? Surely, the present is not a fitting season for such idle display?"

Lord Argentine, for such it was, now explained to the wonder-stricken grocer all that had occurred to him, adding that he had intended coming to him that very day, if he had not been thus anticipated, to give him the present explanation.

"And where are Farmer Wingfield and Blaize?" asked Mr. Bloundel. "We have been extremely uneasy at your prolonged absence."

"They are both at the palace," replied Lord Argentine, "and have both been laid up with slight injuries received during the conflagration, but I believe — nay, I am sure, they will get out to day."

"That is well," replied Mr. Bloundel — "and now let me congratulate you, Leonard—that is my lord — how strange such a title sounds!—on your new dignity."

"And accept my congratulations, too, my lord," said Stephen.

"Oh! do not style me thus," said Argentine. "With you, at least, let me be ever Leonard Holt."

"You are still my old apprentice, I see," cried the grocer, warmly grasping his hand.

"And such I shall ever continue in feeling," returned the other, cordially returning the pressure.

Three days after this, Lord Argentine was united to the Lady Isabella — the King, as he had promised, giving away the bride. The Earl of Rochester was present, together with the grocer and his wife and the whole of their family. Another marriage also took place on the same day between Blaize and Patience. Both unions, it is satisfactory to be able to state, were extremely happy, though it would be uncandid not to men-

tion, that in the latter case, to use a homely but expressive phrase, "the grey mare proved the better horse." Blaize, however, was exceedingly content under his government. He settled at Willesden with his wife, where they lived to a good old age, and where some of his descendants may still be found.

Mr. Bloundel sustained only a trifling loss by the fire. Another house was erected on the site of the old habitation, where he carried on his business as respectably and as profitably as before, until in the course of nature, he was gathered to his fathers, and succeeded by his son Stephen, leaving an unblemished character behind him as a legacy to his family. Nor was it his only legacy, in a worldly sense, for his time had not been misspent, and he had well-husbanded his money. All his family turned out well, and were successful in the world. Stephen rose to the highest civic dignities, and the younger obtained great distinction. Their daughter Christiana became Lady Argentine, being wedded to the eldest son of the Baron and Baroness.

Mike Macascree, the piper, and Bell, found a happy asylum with the same noble family.

As to Lord and Lady Argentine, theirs was a life of uninterrupted happiness. Devotedly attached to her lord, the Lady Isabella seemed only to live for him, and he well repaid her affection. By sedulously cultivating his talents and powers,

which were considerable, he was enabled to reflect credit upon the high rank to which it had pleased a grateful sovereign to elevate him. He lived to see the new cathedral completed by Sir Christopher Wren, and often visited it with feelings of admiration, but never with the same sentiments of veneration and awe that he had experienced, when, in times long gone by, he had repaired to Old Saint Paul's.

THE END.

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